BEAUTY TALBOT.

BY

PERCY FITZGERALD, M.A.

AUTHOR OF "BELLA DONNA," "NEVER FORGOTTEN," &c.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

LONDON:

RICHARD BENTLEY, NEW BURLINGTON STREET.

1870.

The right of Translation is reserved.

BEAUTY TALBOT.

CHAPTER I.

MISS LIVY'S FIRST APPEARANCE.

THERE is a pretty by-way of the Great Western, considered a failure as to traffic, and quite as retired as a little country lane or bridle-road. It wound up to the station, Pengley, through a deep cutting made by Nature, and lined with a velvety sward, and trimmings of Nature's own millinery. The station burrowed snugly at the bottom, just as a lap-dog does on his mistress's skirt, and was fenced at the other end from winds and showers, by a sudden hill, where a tunnel

began. The house was like a Swiss station, with a varnished wood verandah overgrown with creepers; and squire and clergyman often said any man would be well off in that little box, and that they would change with Fenton any day. Fenton, the station master, was always treated in a studiously friendly and intimate way; —for the legend ran that, "Fenton was a gentleman;"—had been a lieutenant in the army, had run through everything, and some Sir John had got him this place. He was a very gentlemanly man, a little sensitive, and above his situation; which, wisely and well, was never alluded to, or droned over by him. The little Swiss station was, of course, like a pigeon cot, and from every window hopped little heads in and out, like Sir John Suckling's mice, and those heads were, of course, the property of the *çi-devant* officer.

Round about it rose and fell a warm cozy sort of country, with a snug and sheltered lane that led up to a village, and another that brought us to a no less sheltered high road, along which wandered the unfrequent tramp, or groaned the laden four horse waggon, and merrily bowled the light coach, which the railway had not yet driven out, as St. Patrick might have done a solitary snake. Half a mile off behind the clump, nestled the village, which was indeed not worth a station, and beyond the village a dotted settlement of not more than half a dozen houses, which was the neighbourhood. These were of an old pattern, and stood scattered like vedettes. Here was none of the herding, and economical clustering of new houses upon ground that is being built upon.

One Saturday evening in winter, which

is the evening of our first little scene, Fenton, the station-master, has just turned in to his office, after standing deferentially on his platform to do homage to the express, which thundered by contemptuously, and would not know Pengley. For the express, Pengley had a sacred awe and admiration, yet mingled with dislike, as for a badge of servitude. It had to do with humble, plebeian trains that came creeping up, after stopping at every station. In a quarter of an hour after the express had gone by, such a decent convoy was due; and now Fenton hears the jingling of bells, and looking through his window sees the Red Hill little carriage coming over the bridge, Mr. Talbot driving, and which will turn presently and trundle down the little lane to the station. Friendly vehicles were often thus seen at a distance, and Fenton always contrived

to detain the train, on some pretext. Mr. Talbot gets out and comes on the platform to talk to Fenton.

"Miss Livy in the next train?" says Fenton.

"Yes," answers Mr. Talbot, taking out a rich and gaudy cigar case of seal skin—a large golden monogram, and crimson watered silk lining, &c.

"You know a good cigar, Fenton?"

Charming and delicate fingers held out the case; choice rings were on them, the finest linen about the wrist, above the wrist a coat of fur. Mr. Talbot was tall, slight, graceful, with black hair, no beard or moustache, because his mouth and smile were considered "charming," and looked no more than five-and-thirty. He was about forty; clothes, everything, were of the best make; he was pale, his hair was parted in the middle, and he was the father

of the heroine of this little narrative, Miss Olivia Talbot.

The two gentlemen walk up and down the station. The station-master never says "sir," but at the same time never alludes, or notices allusions, to his older and better days.

"She went in to get some finery," said Mr. Talbot, "for her mamma and self. Those Hardman people open their staring new house with a dinner to-night."

"Yes," said the other; "look here, and here," pointing to parcels and boxes. "It has been the same for this month back."

"Exactly. Wealth, money, vulgarity, all daubed on in its grossest form. A blazing dinner. But they will find it hard to astonish *me*, even if the chairs were of solid gold. We *have* to go."

"Here is the train."

And out came the one porter, and the one third-class passenger, who was going to get in. The porter began his song, "Pengley! Pengley! Pengley!" going down the carriages, until he opened a door, and, touching his cap, began to take out parcels. Then a young lady, followed by a stout woman in black, came out, and tripped up softly to Mr. Talbot, and gave him a kiss, which she would have done had it been an excursion train, full of grinning "cads" and clodhoppers; but it was a range of desolate saloon carriages, with a scattered gentleman or two, reading newspapers.

This is Miss Livy. The evening is a little grey, but it is easy to see her. She is small, but delicately made, with a peaked velvet hat and green plume, a little gay, with a delicately cut face, which was so like her father's in this way; that any one

looking at *him*, at once thought of her, though no one looking at her, ever dreamed of him. The reader will see what a distinction is here. She was not more than eighteen, but had a possessed manner that people of thirty often want, and which gave her a specially piquant charm; for a contrast between so young a face and so wise a little soul was a delight and surprise to observers. At times, however, she would give the word, all the lamps would be turned on, and that delicate face lit up with a perfect illumination of good spirits and intelligence. But these small points will work themselves out in her character, as this little history goes on.

"Beauty, dear," she said, nervously —and she rarely called him papa, for she had long discoverd that he thought himself more like her brother, or hus-

band—"let us get to the carriage quickly I just escaped that odious Hardman, who is in the train."

But she was not to escape now; for the tall arrogant-looking man, with head and hat thrown back, and nose and chin in the air, and a kind of Brummagen "statesmanship" in the way he carried his umbrella under his arm (copied from Canning, and Peel, statues), was coming up to them. His face was thin and pinched, and with those coarse streaks of pink we see in the skin of a man of low origin, as though his cheeks had done hard service, like his hands.

This was Mr. Hardman of The Towers yonder, who had made his money in banks and railways, and was said to have begun as an errand-boy in the City, and then had been a ticket collector. He had got into Parliament for a Scotch

burgh, which he had bought, as he had bought his place, and bought so clumsily, that he had to stand a most expensive contest and more expensive unseating. He had bought The Towers from a lord, and would have preferred it on that account to a handsomer place at a lower price.

"Very unwarrantable—scandalous!" he said, as he came. "I told *my* coachman to be here a good quarter before the time. Must be an accident."

"Can't say, indeed, Mr. Hardman," said Mr. Talbot, coldly.

"It must be explained though. That man came to me from Farnaby — had been seven years with the Duke — the highest character. Scandalous! Or there must be an accident."

"I wish we could help you. Our ponies could hardly do the five miles,

then five miles back, and then go again for your dinner."

"Oh, *a carriage will come.* We have plenty there. But to be kept waiting here! You'll be in time. We expect a large party, and some coming a greater distance than you are."

Miss Livy was in the carriage,—station-master, porter, and small boy, who carried up a parcel, all busy arranging rugs about her. She had the "ribbons" in her hand, and the light whip, carriage, and ponies suited her as if they had been made to measure. The latter were dappled iron grey, round and short, and coquettishly arching their necks, as indeed their mistress often did hers. Mr. Talbot got in beside her, arranging his fur, &c., about his figure, perhaps to be picturesque to any stray villager they might encounter. Livy gave a touch to

Bouncer, the pony she liked the least, and with a sudden plunge and scattering of gravel they were off, she leaving a pleasant nod and smile to the group.

CHAPTER II.

"THE HOME."

They turned reluctantly to Mr. Hardman, still stalking in the Peel attitude, and whose lips were pursing and blowing indignantly at "the slight."

He to be kept waiting! "I pay my coachman seventy pounds a year —one of the best in England. Came to me from Farnaby," &c. He did not care to speak to the station-master or porter. For the former, indeed, he had a contempt, as being a reduced gentleman. Presently the sound of wheels was heard; and a showy yellow carriage—"my colour"—with sheriff-like liveries, was com-

ing over the bridge. Mr. Hardman stalked out.

"What's this delay? I have been kept!"

The footman explained.

The Duke's coachman did not condescend to offer any excuse—

"Please, sir, I was out with the young ladies;—didn't come in till five minutes ago."

"But I pay other servants. It is most improper, most irregular, and, really, Miller, I hope it won't occur again."

Then the Duke's coachman looked down coldly,—

"Beg pardon, sir; what was you saying to me, sir?"

"Never mind now. I expect you to drive fast."

And they drove away, certainly as

fast as a fine pair of carriage horses could take them; for which animals many knew that "I gave Hopper, of Manchester, my cheque for five hundred."

The Duke's coachman had bought them, and some judges said they were "fair enough in their way," but were not worth three hundred.

Miss Livy had always plenty to say to her young brother-father. There are members of families who never talk to each other save when they have something to tell; news, business—or, perhaps, want to know something. It is beginning to be understood, indeed, that the art of conversation is chiefly based on talking about nothing. Good spirits, good will, and good humour are certainly the three keys. Our Livy had them all in her possession, hung, as it might be, to

that gold chatelaine of hers. Whereas her dear Talbot's key was himself, his mirror, and his monkey; or, less metaphorically, his own plans, own prospects, pleasures, and such like, on which, to do him justice, he could enlarge charmingly. And, let it be said, that to listen to people telling you about themselves is not unentertaining, provided it be not a mere brutal exhibition of selfishness—akin to looking at yourself in the glass—the man or woman turning *you* into such a mirror.

"That low beast, Hardman, I wish we weren't going to him. He grates on me at every turn; but your mother thought it right."

"But you recollect, dear," said she; "Phœbe, you know, and her admirer."

"I see nothing in it, and said so from the beginning. He is a knowing,

selfish old campaigner. But, of course, as she has set her mind on it——"

"And it will be so amusing, dear; we shall have so much to laugh at and talk of."

"That's true. There's nothing so comical as wealthy vulgarity. I dare say I shall have some offensive bit of trade stuck on to me."

"No, no. They will give you some nice-looking, well-born officer's wife. They know well how brilliantly you talk and write, and what good society you have been in. A handsome fellow isn't to be thrown away."

"What does it matter, being handsome or brilliant in a place like this?" said Mr. Talbot, despairingly. "I might as well show myself to the Andaman Islanders. Still, we shall amuse ourselves; unless they show their igno-

rance and ill-breeding, by some stupid *gaucherie* taking your mother in second, or something of the kind.'"

"They couldn't," said she, eagerly; "there is something about mamma — I don't know how to describe it—an air, a style of birth, and good society, that it would be impossible to overlook. That dignity and look of refinement, Beauty dear, seems to me to come out in contrast with these sort of people; and any stranger, seeing you and her coming into the room, would know the true metal, and ask your name."

"There is a good deal in that, Livy. Your mother *has* that sort of air of good breeding and high birth which can't be bought. It is far better than good looks, which have got cheap enough."

As they talk and drive on, to the jangling of the Norwegian bells, the

quick-sighted reader may have guessed from this fragment what was in Miss Livy's mind. Nay, a shrewd observer, having heard such a snatch of conversation in real life, would construct the whole social interior of this household much as the ingenious Owen made up whole elks and megatheria from a toe-joint. It seemed as though that pretty young girl, having this young and good-looking father, was likely enough to have at home a mamma a good deal older, and who, alas! was growing older, as women do, far faster than he was. Was Livy the one who stood between, and so amiably held her hands before her father's good eyes; or else a gauze veil before her mamma's fading charms, and with ceaseless exertion tried every day to make the disagreeable old man with the scythe mow gently, or appear not to

now at all? And it is a fact that she absolutely succeeded to a degree. At least, with another less laborious in the house, the family of Talbot the Handsome would have been in a poor way. Faith moves mountains; but love's labour is rarely lost.

When Livy fluttered up the steps into the house, she found two ladies in the circular drawing-room. One of them was her mother, the other her mother's sister, the Honourable Phœbe.

The Honourable Phœbe was a poor infirm creature; she had not the style, or the looks, or the genius, as it may be called, of her sister. She was "getting on to a cool forty," said the ill-natured ones, whose business is to watch these things; but she had not the exquisite art of disguising. Her nose was *retroussé*, turned up, in fact; and though it would

be beyond art or science to alter that, still, is there not a way of *diverting* attention from so obnoxious a feature, by developing other shining beauties? The skilful painter can make a black appear pale blue, by disposing certain colours about it. She could do little for herself, and never could. She had good-will, and nothing else. She did not know how to economise speech or action, to methodise her conduct, so as to conduce to a great end. She did not know how to arrange her wares, such as they were, in her shop window. The best were lying in the cellars, until her sister and Livy good-naturedly stepped in, and naturally offered to help her, and teach her shopkeeping.

A certain Colonel Labouchere, who commanded the ——th regiment of Hussars, a man with grey moustache, but still gay and not old, who had been a

dashing cavalry officer, had somehow taken notice of Phœbe at several balls. He had danced, he had talked, he had walked with her. The paint brush of Phœbe, dipped in the most glowing colours, had worked out of these materials a picture of the most gorgeous kind, and drew the grey Colonel like one of his own Arabian chargers — eager, flaming-eyed, uncontrollable, with the bit between his teeth, and frantic to clear the matrimonial hurdles at a bound.

This account was received by her relatives with their usual large margin of allowance, Phœbe's incorrect drawing, and over enormous canvases, being well known to them. But they were very good-natured; and when it was known that the Hussar regiment had moved recently to ——, six miles from Pengley, Mrs. Talbot was quite eager that "Poor

Phœbe" should be sent for at once, and come and stay "two months at the least" with them. The conspiracy was entered into eagerly; and Livy became a perfect ringleader; as Mr. Talbot put it, the Colonel was to be snaffled and not let out of the country with his life. The regiment was sure to be there two years at least; so there was time to form a splendid plan, and from their little rifle pit they might securely plan attack after attack, sally after sally, until the enemy grew weary and laid down his arms.

Not very much success had hitherto crowned their united efforts; indeed, Phœbe's good allies held privately small hopes, and Mrs. Talbot often owned to her husband "that there was no doing anything for Phœbe," whose second affair this was. Latterly, however, some curious signs had been noticed about the Colonel, which

made the assailants redouble their efforts. Our Livy had also noted other signs; she was very far seeing and penetrating, but she was too delicate to reveal what she suspected. The shrewd reader will think she anticipates what is to be told, but may be warned here she is mistaken. Colonel Labouchere, C.B., liked, as everybody did, but did not "admire" as it is called, our heroine.

Mrs. Talbot was sitting on the sofa as they entered, in her afternoon *toilette*, for she dressed at home pretty much as they would do at a fashionable watering-place, and she knew that this strict discipline of herself insured certain discipline, respect, and admiration in others. The attitude as she entered was a model of grace, not, perhaps, affected for that occasion, but habit and repetition had given her natural ease. She was reading.

One of Talbot's published "compositions," as it is only courtesy to call them, was open on the piano, and the hint was conveyed that she had been practising it.

"I suppose it is time to go and dress, Beauty," she said, for he liked the title now, "Phœbe has been at work an hour ago."

"Poor Phœbe," said he, "what is it to be?—the crimson, or the yellow, or the blue?"

"No, we must turn her out in white, I shall take care of that. But what am I to put on? You must settle for me."

The Beauty became reflective, as if he had been asked to make up a sum of money, or to divide one set of fractions by another, which indeed he could not have done.

"Yes," he said, "for they have got hold

of the Northfleets, and some nice people, *she*,"—an allusion to Lady Northfleet,—"has wonderful taste and finery. So I must ask you both to do your best, and look as well as you can for the credit of the house."

"We'll not disgrace you, Beauty dear," said Livy. The two ladies passed out to their important duty, and Mr. Talbot, with a soft sigh, which seemed to say, "All is on my elegant shoulders, and I must think of everything for them," lounged carelessly to the piano, on whose chords he laid his elegant fingers. It was rather an unfortunate thing for his house and his friends, when he took to "composition," or rather to publication of his compositions. The bill for engraving, advertisements, &c., was heavy; and there was to be read in the papers something like this:—

"Mr. Albert Talbot's New Song: 'He gave one look at parting;' Words and Music by Albert Talbot, Esq., Author of 'His arching mouth and dimpled smile,' —'Cara-Cole Valse,' &c."

The real publication consisted in the distribution of copies as presents. It was Mrs. Talbot who got Miss Ivors, her young friend, who had really a fine voice, to practise and learn, "He gave one look at parting," overcoming the young lady's scruples as to what she called "such curious words, you know." But Talbot was "difficult." He was now trying it himself in his rather feminine voice. As he played and warbled, the subdued light from a lamp played on that little round room, which was the essence of comfort and snugness, and on which, indeed, Mrs. Talbot had spared no money to make comfortable. Bookcases ran round,

and gave it an air of coziness, rich pictures, warm carpets, elegant little tables, "snug" chairs, and all manner of pleasant and convenient trifles. It was, indeed, a cozy house, old, but made cozier by alterations and additions. The very lobbies were rooms, and furnished as rooms. The hall was another room; the whole was compact and tight, and nestled in a green corner under shelter.

Mr. Talbot soon got tired of his song; but an idea for a new one occurred to him, which he began to work out on the notes, *his* way of composition, though he mysteriously seemed to convey to friends that he had mastered thorough bass and harmony, and "scored away" at his desk. Whatever he wrote, a devouring craze for publishing seized him. He used to get quite delighted with his "thoughts;" but now the three ladies in

splendid raiment rustled in like queens, and surprised him at his task.

"We shall be late, Beauty dear," said Livy, anxiously.

He was put out at being interrupted, and rose pettishly. He was a little of a child still.

"You must hurry, you know," said his wife; "we have a long way to drive."

Mr. Talbot took nearly an hour for his regular festive toilette. On this occasion he was quicker. The carriage is at the door, glistening, with the steps down, and the three ladies are getting in. Beauty Talbot comes last, in exquisitely made clothes, that some way show the shape of his ancles and limbs; and delicately scented. Then folds himself up, as it were, and insinuates himself into a crevice among them, more fearful than they of being

crushed. The door is shut to, and away they drive briskly for The Towers.

Talbot's history was a little curious. Nearly every one said he had married too early; a few, that he had thrown himself away; which, translated, often means that it is the other who has been thrown away.

CHAPTER III.

"BEAUTY" TALBOT.

As they drive, then, at this smart pace over stones and hillocks, we may just look back a little, as Mr. Talbot does often at the country behind from his seat, and sometimes does in his study, at the earlier country of his life.

When twenty years old, Albert Talbot was a very handsome creature indeed; pale, soft, languishing, of delicate colour, with the darkest, glossiest hair, which would have gone into ringlets had he allowed it; and when he was set off with deep velvets and rich purple tints, was nearly as much admired by others as he

was by himself. He was known by his friends as "Beauty" Talbot, an epithet which did not at all displease him, though it hinted at effeminacy.

Beauty Talbot did well at the university —was found to have brains, which disappointed the stupid men who were fond of sneering at his fair skin; and when he left college, coming of a gentlemanly stock, found himself in the very best society. He was very well off "for a young man," his father having about eighteen hundred a year, and no other children and many good connections. A profession was thought of for a time; but the one he chose—and, let it be remembered, it is often more profitable than others—was Country Houses. This he embraced with ardour. He became "spread,"—*répandu*, as the French put it. This delightful, charming, interesting creature, with the

sweet voice and lovely hands, could not be done without anywhere. His liquid eyes and delicate skin committed deadly havoc among the virgins and matrons. He sang, and played upon the piano. He did not shoot, and did not care for hunting, though he hunted "like a man." The materials used in Beauty Talbot's profession were chiefly hair-brushes. The display of these articles was really magnificent. He might have exhibited those gorgeous instruments at South Kensington: massive tooth-brushes, which it was a pleasure to feel and wield; exqusite monograms; crest in raised gold, mediæval touch. They lay, when not in use, or on their travels, in a blue morocco case, expressly constructed for their reception, nestling, in silk. They cost a fortune. Truefitt's bill indeed was serious; his "ess. bouquet" was ordered in gallons. A lovely

youth; "Endymion was nothing to him," an envious ugly friend remarked; and sure to do well in the profession he had chosen.

It was amazing the advantage Beauty Talbot had over other men at any innings he took in the game of society. Other men had to exert themselves—it was all done for him. For some objects ladies are privileged to show their preference in an almost indecent way. They said openly they were quite in love with Beauty Talbot, and his lovely eyes, and smooth skin —things they would have "died" sooner than have remarked in the great manly Captain Bushe, or Mr Barron, with the huge luxuriant fox-coloured beard. He seemed to have the privileges of little boys of tender years, who are admitted to bathe with ladies.

And so he fluttered for a year or two, from house to house, literally doing what

he pleased—bringing about his noble hair-brushes, his violet, his mauve, his velvet, his pumps and scarlet stockings, his fine hands and his lisp. He played little waltzes on the piano, *composed* by himself, with quite a feminine touch. He composed little ballads to French words, which any young woman was only too proud to copy out, learn, and sing for him; and yet more transported to hear him sing, in his warble-chirrup. The fox-bearded men, sometimes contemptuously put aside by him, were, in their own slang, "fit to be tied." "Where are his petticoats?" they would say. "A creature that I could just take up between my thumb and finger and squeeze as I would an insect. And his saucy airs!"

One Christmas, Beauty Talbot was asked down to a great house for the festivities of the season. Oxberry Hall was full to

over-flowing. Lady Oxberry said,—"Positively, if my dear Cupid wasn't coming, I'd give up the whole thing." Great men and great women were to be there—a Cabinet Minister, to go out cock-shooting; a bishop, not of the real sort, "one of the colonial creatures, my dear," said Lady Oxberry; various supernumeraries of society, who are wanted to fill up the stage, and give cues for the greater actors. Among others came the daughter of the late Lord Langrishe. The Honourable Eva had fine hair, golden, a fine complexion and presence, and was a fine girl generally.

"But, my dear," said Lady Oxberry, in her own deliciously special manner, "that woman has hacked and worked about the world more than one of those navvies you see on the railway. Try her on Homburg, Baden, Harrogate, Scarborough, Brighton, *even Jersey*, my dear, though

she won't own to it; but *I* know it from a sure source. There was a man there, and they followed him. She could write a guide-book, that woman. Scandalous!"

Lady Oxberry never said "girl," and she could give us a splendid catalogue of the various human types. Yet to the woman herself Lady Oxberry spoke softly —as "Eva dearest," which Eva dearest knew perfectly did not mean hypocrisy, and accepted as being about as conventional as the "ever sincerely yours" of a letter. The description was quite accurate, indeed, rather undercoloured. Not the barrister grinding till three in the morning, and exhausting himself in court to "carry a case," could slave harder than she did to carry hers, and win a matrimonial verdict. But she was unfortunate, cast after cast was a failure; and a reputation for failures brought fresh failures. It is well known

that the most skilful captain, if he be unlucky, is shunned; and thus the years had gone by—or, rather, stolen by, as, alas! they will do, during the third and fourth decade of our lives. It began to be said, with enjoyment, that the Honourable Eva was "pretty well on, you know, now;" and the fatal word "*passée*" was being heard. Younger soldiers were rudely pushing by her to the front, muttering that she was stopping the promotion, and ought to retire. She herself was losing the *élan* with which she had so often maintained the fight, and was doing duty now more from habit and mechanical exertion.

In this state of things she found herself at Oxberry, and, for the first time, met Beauty Talbot. That youth had never seen her, and was much struck by her mature charms. She was, indeed, a fine creature still, as many a soldier pronounced.

To the Beauty she herself was not indifferent; and, having made some necessary inquiries, determined to get ready the old well-worn gear—the brown, torn nets, let down over the side so often, and through which so many a plump and noble fish had broken—once more.

Lady Oxberry was in a good-natured vein, and co-operated without giving herself much trouble. A lady of the house, who is favourable, is, like cavalry in battle, a truly valuable arm. She had daughters, too, just going to step down into the circus; and it was no harm to get a rival horsewoman out of the way.

Beauty was accordingly judiciously rallied and complimented—not on *his* preference, but on *hers* for him, a far more artful proceeding. As at the close of a season, Messrs. Howell and James, "clearing off stock," will take any reasonable

offer for what at the beginning they disdainfully refused you, so the Honourable Eva made up her mind that a good looking youth, so much her junior, and in possession of some fifteen hundred a-year, was really highly desirable, and far preferable to an inglorious solitude.

It came about at last. Had it been proposed seriously and suddenly to the Beauty he would have taken flight, and perhaps taken post and fled miles from Oxberry. But the great, hulking man, with the fox-coloured beard, who had the bitterest contempt for Beauty, unconsciously contributed. He was never weary, was Dick Barron, of 'chaffing' the youth, who was not unsuccessful in his replies. Perhaps he had a lurking admiration himself for the Honourable Eva; but his favourite tone was infinite amusement at the notion of that 'china figure' inspiring any liking in any lady.

"See here, Beauty," he would say, in the smoking room; "they think about you, very much as they do about the little urchins that are allowed to bathe with the grown-up ladies—that is, they don't think about you *at all*."

"You have vulgar ideas, Barron," the Beauty would answer, calmly; "not to say coarse. You picked up that in your savage travels."

"That's neither here nor there; but what I say is, the folly of a fellow like you thinking women would take you up seriously as they would other men. You know the way they put little Tommy on their knees, not that I mean that they'd do that to *you*; but I mean all this means nothing with *you*. Now Beauty thinks, because all the women pet him, as they do the white poodle upstairs, that they are all in love with him. And that girl Lan-

grishe, I'll bet any sum, he thinks is pining away for him."

The other smiled good-humouredly. "I never make bets about ladies ; I don't think any gentleman should. I don't think you know much what you are talking about."

"Beauty knows what he's doing," said another gentleman ; indeed Eva having no mamma, or brother, or father alive, was always spoken of like a 'man,' "and the Langrishe may have a sneaking kindness for him after all. Women are queer cattle."

"And men," said Beauty, "seem to be very coarse fishes. I'm tired of the subject. Let us change it."

But Big Barron was not, and came back to it very often. In his lumbering way it seemed to him something of a joke, in which department he was but poorly furnished, and had to make up by repeti-

tion for variety. There are many men of this sort, who require a butt of some sort to bring out their dormant humour; and this stupid fellow harped on this poor topic *ad nauseam* almost. Old Dick Lumley—who will appear by-and-by—could have told the whole story minutely

The Oxberry festivities went on bravely. There was a ball and dancing, and on one night a play, in which all the ladies took a part. The leading character, "Helen of Troy," fell, as of right, to Miss Langrishe, whose golden hair was splendidly in keeping. For that night she made what the envious called a vigorous rally, and by enormous exertion, by artistic decoration, exquisite dress, and enforced animation of feature, succeeded in reducing her age, just as a jockey in training would his weight, to about eighteen. It was a wonderful *tour de force;* but the human will, when

concentrated, will perform still greater marvels. Nearly every one was delighted, and people who saw her for the first time thought her "perfectly lovely," Female rivals—who knew all the details, how every touch was done, "who could tell real lace from false" in a glance, and but too often, when their passions interposed, pronounced real lace mere imitation—the sniffs and sneers of these disdainful partisans through that eventful evening were indeed trying, but they did not touch her; for rejuvenescent the whole night, she was borne on one triumphant tide of success. She had the public of the place with her. When you have the public with you on any occasion, you may despise enemies, snarlers, and even critics; and with her she had her own admirer, squire, and *clacqueur*, Beauty Talbot.

Festival nights of this sort, when

there are lights, enthusiasm, gaudiness, and a general halo over everybody and everything, are specially dangerous for the cautious man and the half-professional "flirt"—odious term! used here with apology—who would go on his road reaping all the enjoyment and delights, which others, more honourable, also seek, but attended with graver responsibilities. In that glare, the ardent and dazzling glow, the barley-sugar barriers which fence his resolutions thaw and droop down into a universal solvence, he is carried away in a rush, overleaping that sticky barrier, and too often cannot undo the night's work. So it was to be with our Beauty—the ladies' pet—already predisposed. She seemed radiant, lovely even, and there was a gentle languor, a pensive melancholy, a confidence for him, and him only, that was in itself attractive.

It was at the end of the third act that she came to him in hysterical tears. She could hardly tell him the cause of her trouble. The place opened on a garden, and seriously he begged of her to come out into the cool air. Then the mature Eva told him, that as she passed by the wing, she had heard her enemy—that cruel, unkind Mr. Barron—making his remarks on her,—dark, cutting, ungenerous speeches. Oh, so cruel——"

"A coarse, ill-bred fellow," said the other, excited; "but I have long intended to bring him to account, and now——"

"Not for the world! not for the world!"

There was perfect truth in this. The unconscious giant, lounging against the scene, his hands in his pockets, was criticising the leading actress with a caustic

and yet indifferent severity, which he little dreamed she overheard. It was some such expression as this :—

"The ancient is getting through the work amazingly. She must have been practising at a gymnasium all last week." Gentlemen *do* talk thus indelicately among themselves.

On such a night it seemed doubly coarse, and besides quite ridiculously untrue and out of nature. Beauty Talbot could not resist the influences of a dramatic situation. There is a pleasant sweetness and luxury in such a moment, which we may defy the coldest and most calculating pundit of us all to resist. He had that chivalry in him which is "youth." In short, before they left that garden he was enrolled—solemnly sworn her champion and defender. The tears were dried by the delicate fingers of the Beauty,

holding the most exquisite cambric. The performance went on triumphantly to the end. But in the smoking-room that night, when the hulking Barron was recommencing his one stale topic, the Beauty interposed and said, quietly,—

"You must stop all that now, Barron. I can't stand by and suffer any more of that language. I give you fair warning."

"And why, pray?" said the other, good humouredly.

Then the Beauty told him. And, in justice to the rough Barron, it must be said that he seized the womanly hand, wrung it warmly, and poured out many excuses and hearty congratulations.

But with the next day came the cold grey of the morning. It was like walking across a stage at eight o'clock of a November day after the glorious *début*

of a prima donna. The Beauty awoke, as it were. The change for him, indeed, was the suddenest and strangest; ladies looked on him curiously, as if he had been transformed in the night. He was reduced to being a private. It was believed he would have committed suicide; but there was no escape. Unlucky as that sportswoman had been, in her gentle art—indifferent Waltonian—once she had something on her line, she was not likely to let it go. The marriage was speedily "arranged," as it is called, and the Beauty was (perhaps, literally) led to the altar.

With this alliance began, of course, quite a new life for Beauty Talbot. The name he never lost, though it was applied more from the wish to avoid the trouble of unlearning anything, which the public always dislikes. He was said to be fairly

broken-in; but a greater change came over the Honourable Mrs. Talbot. It has been mentioned that she really liked the Beauty; and she seemed to her friends, from the hour of her marriage, to have put on quite a new character. She really flung away the old arms—for armour she wore none, as she was only too willing to receive a wound—with delight. She was sick of the old campaigning and skirmishing and the trenches, and was delighted to retire thus on full pay. She genuinely laid herself out to be domestic, and to make the Beauty contented and happy—a task of surprising difficulty; for he was by no means weary of the trenches, and literally pined for what Barron had called being "petted among the ladies," like a little boy of tender years. He moped and mused; it was the air he had

breathed. What was to become of him? He would sicken and die. Perhaps he had sacrificed himself; perhaps he was lost and undone for ever. The enemies and rivals, who never forgave her, were not indisposed to encourage this tone. She had committed one of the unpardonable sins. They were never weary of shooting their little arrows, tipped with a venomous poison, which festered and irritated. The poison was, "that woman and her boy," on which the changes were rung. Yet nothing could have been more unfair. There was about ten or twelve years between them; and she looked not very much older. But that majority was on the wrong side; and she was unwearied in her efforts to atone for it.

Firstly, she took him to travel for two years, wisely judging it prudent to remove him from those who were his

old friends and her old enemies. This answered very fairly for a time, until they got to Paris, and then to some of the fashionable watering-places, where the good looks of the Beauty found him some admirers. She had then to remove him home, and she took a small house in London, where she began seriously to devise and cogitate how she was to employ him. After much trouble and toil she got him a place, that was at once genteel and out of mischief, in the Palace, on what was called the Board of Green Cloth, with not much to do and not much salary. It suited him exactly. He was thrown with some "nice" people—was in a good atmosphere. But it would be endless to record the unwearied arts of this singular woman at home to secure her influence. For there was besides a *simplicity* in the Beauty,

under all his follies, which attracted, and under good training, would have made him, in the conventional phrase, a useful member of society; and a good nature, which exhibited itself where his own interest was not very directly concerned.

The result, however, was, that these laborious arts bore fruit, and he at last, after a faint struggle, and by the judicious removal and fencing off of all temptation, began to fall completely under the influence of his wife. Not that he was conscious of this, in the least, and believed he had a strong mind and "a will of his own." Her "arts," as will be seen, were all directed to the aim of maintaining that influence, and of hiding from him the ravages of the cruel enemy, Time. He was taught—it was forced upon him—to believe that she was superior to most women: so

elegant and refined, and with the true style; and some really good-natured old friends of hers co-operated. One of these Samaritans, whom we shall see presently, Mr. Lumley, whom the Beauty looked up to amazingly, did wonders in this direction. It was impossible, indeed, not to feel sympathy for such unwearied efforts. She certainly had the art of dress—had also the art of keeping her hair, her colour, her eyes, and of concealing that art.

But it would have all broken down after a few years, but for a new and more powerful ally that began to move upon the scene. The pretty heroine of this story had come into the world, was growing up, from a piquant infant into a pretty and delightful little girl, wearing a blue cloak and straw hat, and with her dark hair tumbling about her in curls

as she cantered along by the seaside on a high-spirited donkey, laughing with enjoyment, and making the heart of the school-boy, who looked after her, ache for long after. As she glided on from ten years old to fifteen, from fifteen to eighteen, the troubled mother found her a wonderful and far more skilful assistant. Her devices were inexhaustible, and infinitely more original. She made it all secure; and though the paternal heart was not bubbling over with affections or doating on her, she was irresistible in her way. The jewel of that household was Miss Livy.

Thus do we find them, on the evening she came down from town, and drove her ponies from the station, her young father-brother sitting beside her. How often she wished things could go on so for ever. They were so happy—

her brother-father so young and pleasant, mamma so tranquil, life so enjoyable. Alas! that the great wain of time should be hurrying down an incline with a gathering velocity. There are pleasant epochs in life, when the sense of tranquil felicity is so keen, we should wish the break put on, and all things to stop—for a time at least. Their little pleasant house, and the delightful little interior, where they were all so happy together—there was no reason "in life" why things should not go on. The faith and purpose of these two women could at least secure that. The passiveness of Beauty Talbot made everything the more secure. He was so "broken in," so trained now, he could be trusted among whole flocks of ladies. Such is the text—the *carte de pays;* it will not be difficult to follow out the sermon.

CHAPTER IV.

THE MAN OF MONEY.

WHILE the Talbots are driving swiftly to this party, we may take a glance at their host, Richard Hardman, Esq., now on his rug, in a senatorial attitude.

A low, coarse fellow. But "lords" and "people of that sort," found him quite another description of man. They always said that "Hardman was a shrewd clever man of the world, whose opinion on any subject was worth money." He was pushing and forward; but it was impossible not to respect a person who had raised himself "from the very dregs," whatever they were, and could hold his

own with any of the moneyed men of the kingdom. You asked him to meet a number of men of rank, and men of intellect, and it was impossible to pass over Hardman, who, in a quiet way "held his own," and did not obtrude any of the vulgar "I could buy and sell *you*," —the syllogism on every subject, to which men of his class reduce all reasoning. The host would whisper, "That's Hardman, at the end of the table, a shrewd, clear-sighted City man; began with nothing, made his money out of his brain, perfect man of the world, long-headed to a degree."

It is surprising the respect with which noble persons thus regard intelligent men of this sort, who do not represent the mere *animal* type of wealth, as it may be called, and which is a chuckling, selfish, good-for-nothing type; but who

are sufficiently deferential and even obsequious, and, it is to be feared, can give a sort of return in the shape of a rare and useful bit of information Citywards, which may be turned into money. For the aristocrats of the kingdom are not above receiving "information" in other matters, as well as in the racing. A startling truth was stated not long ago, that "the Irish were now the most stingy race in the kingdom," and it is a *pendant* for that truth that the "noble" persons of our kingdom have a certain greed of "low" money, and an eagerness for getting it, that is inconceivable. Mr. Hardman, shrewd fellow that he was, took due account of this foible, and turned it to his own profit.

About Richard Hardman was often asked the question, "Who was he?" That almost ungrammatical question, and

one of the audacious ellipses in the language,—stands for a whole biography. But here again Mr. Hardman was exceptional. We hear of a Chancellor of England who was a bedmaker, or a scrivener, or some such thing; of peers who swept a warehouse. These are matters of just pride, as in the case of Mr. Bounderby, boasting of the hedge as that four-post bed under whose shelter he was born. But somehow no one "raked up" these things in Mr. Hardman's instance. The mystery was, no one knew anything, and yet each human figure has its place in the universe, filling up a certain space, comes in contact with a number of people, and must be noted and recollected. At the police courts, the jailors and warders remember Mr. Sykes, as having been under their charge so many years ago.

Some one once stated that Richard Hardman's father had kept a shop in some particular town. But there was no evidence. Who would believe it now? There was the man himself, a millionaire, as it was believed. "A perfect gentleman, I assure you. So intelligent, so shrewd, it is quite a pleasure to talk to him." They were not above consulting him on their little, mean, miserable ventures, just as at the German gambling places, we see noble ladies and gentlemen on the strangest terms of familiarity with blackleg gamblers, looking on them with awe and respect.

But it was with ladies, and in ladies' society that Mr. Hardman "showed the cloven hoof" as it is called,—rather exhibited those huge clodhopper hobnailed brogues—symbols of his low vulgarity, and which he unconsciously brought into

the drawing-room, and put up on the sofa and cushions. Here it was that he revealed himself; no training, no purchased education of dinner-giving, or dinner-going, could impart that nice and delicate tact, that bloom which is not to be taught, that "gentleness"—not of blood, but of mind—which is based upon what is considerate, and the feelings of others. This he had not acquired, and never would acquire, and with the best intentions he was perpetually making some blunder, which he would have been delighted to have been allowed to repair in a fashion like this, to take the person aside and say, "My dear sir (or lady), here is a little cheque, which I hope you will let me press on you; you will really oblige me!"

But for real persons of quality,—the high-bred sort, so composed, so confident

and immovable in their proud position,—the calm, tranquil, refined ladies of birth and title, who spoke in a sweet, low, but cold voice, whose eye rested on him with an inquiring, half-indifferent, half-contemptuous way, these seemed as far above him as the angels, whom he read of pompously each Sunday in his prayer-book—("reduced sort of people, who, for that matter, he might buy and sell") —for them he languished; in their every movement and action he saw grace and perfection.

When he first came to this neighbourhood, Mrs. Talbot thus impressed him. She was the true style—had the true, almost contemptuous insolence. For her acquaintance he actually languished; and it was indeed a day of great joy, when that "call" was made. Her refined presence seemed to pervade that gaudy

and "spick and span" house like a perfume. In that gaudy gold and silver, overloaded drawing-room, she was like the pearl or diamond in the forehead of the staringly-coloured idol. He would, did society tolerate it, have abased himself on the carpet, taken that charming foot, *à la* Man Friday, and placed it upon his head.

His great stout wife this enchanting presence did not at all affect in the same way; she was as gratified, but hers was quite a different department of "snobbishness;" and, in truth, quite as low as her husband. She was less vulgar-minded, in a sense. She assumed herself to be "as good as any of them," and accepted such a visit as homage to their great wealth and condition. Her husband looked down on her as thus wanting in refinemement; and thus his

"vulgarity" was the lowest in degree of the two.

On the morning of that auspicious visit, Mr. Hardman was fortunately "within;" so, too, was his wife, but not his daughter Rose. We may dwell a little on this scene, as it will illustrate that strange yet interesting "formation," the soul that has become calcareous, or ossified, by money. After all, such a character followed with the finger along all its windings and lines, is as interesting and as full of surprises as a course of incidents itself. It is, besides, the very turning-point of this little narrative, and brought about a very strange relation between the two families.

Mrs. Talbot had an object in this visit, which will be seen later. She was not indisposed to find them a little useful. She admired, in a dubious way, the

splendour of the drawing-room, praising the richness of the *fabrics*, the treasures of gold, &c., but saying nothing of the way these things were combined. The walls, a blazing salmon and gold, were hung round with pictures "of the modern school," by those eminent painters, "Twelve hundred" or "Two thousand;" for the owner dwelt with infinitely more admiration on those prices than on the humble "fellow" who had laid on the colours. He had succeeded in getting the worst specimen of the masters—gaudy costly failures of a subject, which the painter himself excused to his friends.

"Oh, yes, a thing I did as an experiment. One of the manufacturing men came bothering me to let him have it, so I put in as much colour as I could for the money. A dreadful thing, sir! but done to order."

In this grateful way is sheer *money* spoken of.

With her glass Mrs. Talbot surveyed these treasures. Suddenly at a corner she came upon a little cabinet picture, by a humble French artist—one of his favourite *genre* pieces — a "Game of Chess," in the Meissonier style—bright, clear, firm, and exquisitely finished.

"Ah! that!" said Mr. Hardman; "it's not worthy of the situation. I am ashamed that you should have seen it, Mrs. Talbot; a nice little thing in its way, and good for a beginner."

"A beginner!" she said; "and who did it, pray?"

"Oh, it's a fancy of my daughter's, and shall be cashiered at once. An humble French fellow that died. We took him up a little."

"I cannot tell you how I admire

it," she said; "it is by far the best. In fact, the others cannot compare to it."

She was nearly right; for she had the *débris* of a good early taste. Besides, she was not sorry in a gentle way to take down this monetary arrogance. He was amazed— confused rather.

"Oh, it is good," he said, looking into it. "Great promise. I always said so."

"Promise!" she repeated, smiling. "That was long before—this is performance!"

"Ah, hah! very good, Mrs. Talbot. So cleverly said. Worthy of the House!"

"You don't pay compliments, I see," she answered, quietly. "Now, I tell you, Mr. Hardman, this is the prettiest thing I have seen for years, and any real artist will tell you so. It is worth any money."

"You don't say so, Mrs. Talbot?"

said he, getting out his glasses, and staring it all over, as if looking for the words "any money." "I declare it *is* good—uncommonly good. Unpretending, you know; and now that you say so, *really* good. It has merit."

Mrs. Talbot showed almost disgust at this patronage. He read in her face quite plainly, "You don't know what you are talking about, low man that you are!" "It is worth your collection put together. I don't mean in money, but for pleasing." She swept away with that delicious "high-bred smile," and left Mr. Hardman half pleased, half uncomfortable. His daughter now came in, and found him ruminating.

"Mrs. Talbot has just been here," he said, in a sort of lofty, chamberlain way, and a tacit intimation,—"See what I do for you. Where would you all be but for

me?" A hint which he conveyed in the most insufferably arrogant way at every hour of the day.

"I say, Mrs. Talbot has paid us a visit. I say a very affable, nice sort of person, whom I wish you, Rose, to cultivate. You hear?"

"Affable?" said Rose, coldly. "She has not been patronising us?"

"Folly! You cannot understand the difference between civility and the deference paid to a person of fortune that one is anxious to make a friend of."

"More anxious to come and laugh at us," said Rose, her lip curling. "I know what these sort of people are, and what they stoop to do, with all their good blood and gentility. They will do mean things, as I have seen."

"Oh, ridiculous!" said Mr. Hardman, much put out. "You are thinking of

what you saw of those people in Ireland. The Irish are paupers, high and low. I could buy and sell the richest among them, fifty times over."

"So you could the Talbots, papa. Take my advice," she added, going up to him: "just take her advances for what they are worth. I have heard some of her history, and know what she is perfectly. We shall be much more respectable and respected if we keep to our own set. Let them, if they like, court us; but for God's sake, let us not be seen courting them, or currying a smile from a woman that will ask you to amuse her friends, if she ask at all."

"You are a mere fool!" said Mr. Hardman, in a rage; "utterly ignorant. You have no more sense than that dog. Besides, I will not take any lecturing. It's insulting. Don't speak to me; don't make

such speeches to me. It's infernal disrespectful."

"I mean it for your good, father; and if I have said anything wrong—"

"You have. Mean things for your own good! I know what is thought of me in the county, and over England too, and I won't be interfered with, if I choose to assert the position I am entitled to. Here, you! send round the carriage at once."

The carriage came round.

"Where is Miller?" (the duke's coachman.)

He was told he had to go into the town about "the bad oats." Mr. Hardman threw back his head haughtily, as if about to scold, but recollected himself. The duke's coachman was in the habit of giving warning if he was found fault with even in his absence. ("I 'ear, sir, that you expressed yourself as dissatisfied," &c.)

"Bring down that picture carefully, now; it is of great value." He then drove away, the magnificent steeds ("cost me," &c.) striding out at a good pace.

Rose, wandering back listlessly into the drawing-room, noticed the blank space, and asked what had become of her dear and favourite picture. The answer was, "Master had taken it away in the carriage."

That evening Mr. Hardman sat in the great swinging chamber he called his carriage, in a haughty, "arms-folded" way, as though there were people opposite watching him. Instead of such spectators, was the picture of "The Chess Players," in its gilt frame, leaning against the cushions. The frame gave him some uneasiness; it was not broad, nor rich enough.

"It was a pity," he thought, "there

was not time to get more gold on; but there was nothing like striking when the iron was hot."

The great coach turning up to the modest red-brick house, he got out, was told Mrs. Talbot was at home. and then said, loftily,—

"Be careful in bringing that picture in; it is of value."

It was carried in, and maids—and, *perhaps*, some of higher station looking from lofty eyries in the roof—wondered what this meant. Mr. Talbot himself, passing through the little hall, saw a picture on a chair, and read the solution at once.

Miss Livy was in the drawing-room, and with her bright, beaming face welcomed the man of money cordially. To her he was obsequious, though he fancied she had not the true "high-bred

touch". of her mother—that *latent contempt* which he so admired, yet dreaded.

"Mamma," she said, with animation, "had gone to see him that very morning."

Mr. Hardman (loftily) knew that perfectly. He had had the pleasure of seeing Mrs. Talbot.

Then entered Mrs. Talbot, with a curious look on her face, something rather hard and severe—as it were, giving warning to the visitor,—

"Take care now what you are going to do."

There was, besides, a perplexing interrogatory,—

"What *can* you want with me?"

It made Mr. Hardman nervous, he could not explain how; and at every diversion he made, this cold look was still on him asking, pertinently,—

"Now, please, what do you want?"

At last he was brought to the point rather awkwardly, for Beauty himself—who had been "composing" at the piano, and was much put out at the long interruption—came in.

"I say," he said, "where on earth did that picture in the hall come from—two men playing chess?"

Mrs. Talbot looked very stern.

"Playing chess!"

Mr. Hardman now wished he had left it at home.

"The truth is," he said, "you so admired it, and did me the honour of praising it so much, that——"

The cold eyes were on him.

"Yes, Mr. Hardman; that——"

"That I thought—"—he went on, with a poor attempt at a flourish—"I could not do better than venture to present it to one who—who——"

Here he stopped; the cold face was too much. The Beauty did not know what to say, though not displeased at the House receiving anything.

"Oh, dear, no," said she, decidedly; "*that* would be out of the question. Oh! I never—— However, it was very kind of you to bring it over, because I should like Mr. Talbot to see it, whose criticism will agree with mine, I am sure."

A servant brought in the picture, and it was admired. The stupid man did not seize on the friendly plank thus thrown to him, but became bold again.

"Oh, you must take it, Mrs. Talbot; I insist on it now. No ceremony with us."

Mrs. Talbot looked at him with something like scorn.

"I said, Mr. Hardman, that it was out of the question; I never take pre-

sents, except under circumstances. You must excuse us, indeed." She smiled on him, as if she was saying something complimentary. "Shall I ring for them to take it away? It is so heavy, is it not?"

Beauty Talbot admired the way his wife performed all this—as, indeed, she intended that he should. Clever woman, he thought; but with such a delicate way of doing the thing.

Mr. Hardman got up, very hot and miserable—much hurt, as he showed by his glowing face.

"Oh, no matter," he said; "I assure you the picture is a good one, and you have a loss of it. However, it is no matter in the world—none at all."

"I am so much obliged to you, Mr. Hardman," Mrs. Talbot went on, with a languidly amused air. "I am sure it

was too good of you to come up with it."

"Oh, don't mention it," he said, anxious to get away, and buttoning his coat tightly. There is nothing so humiliating as having to take a thing back.

And Mr. Hardman was savage as he strode down the steps, his picture carried in front. He flung himself back in his carriage and fumed. As he had not the duke's coachman driving, he could vent himself—his head out of the window,—

"Is that the way to treat my horses, sir? You don't know *how* to drive, sir."

Entering the house, his picture carried before him, he came full on his daughter.

"I knew she wouldn't take it, papa. Why didn't you consult me?"

Nothing is so aggravating, even for a good temper, as being thus surprised

at so humiliating a moment. An army in a rout, hurrying along its baggage, is not in a humour to be "brought to book." Hardman answered her angrily:—

"Am I to take you into my confidence? I do what I choose."

"You shouldn't have done this, father. She would have delighted in mortifying us, and be glad of the opportunity. She will call us vulgar and low. And to offer a present to a person you have seen only once or twice—we deserve such a rebuff."

"This is outrageous!" said her father, turning on her, and making his voice resound though the house. "Am I master here? Who pays for everything in this house? And am I to be dictated to in this way? Damn it!" (For, scraping the thin coating of civilisation,

we come on the common workman, with oaths, &c.) "I'll not put up with it! Insulted this way, right and left! Don't speak to me, girl. I, that have raised you out of the mud;—only for me you'd be a common, trolloping——."

She gave him such a look of contempt, and turned from him with a "For shame!"

He was not displeased. He had had the best of *that*, and retired into his den. Strange to say, he was in a greater fury with his daughter than with Mrs. Talbot. He admired and respected, while he ground his teeth. How he would give the world to have that art. How much would he not pay down for it—a cheque for a large amount; but he knew it was hopeless. Even at his business, with inferiors — wretched dependants—he could not compass it. He

could "abuse them," and be insulting also, as he could be overbearing to men his own equals; but he could not attain that courteous, stinging, placid shape of deadly offence. He felt no wish to punish her or revenge himself in any way; but he could not forgive his daughter for *having known more than he did*, and for having foretold what he could not foretell. This is often the heaviest of crimes. Thus he sat in his parlour glowering at people, and enemies who were not present.

This was shortly before the night when the first chapter of this little history opens—in fact, within ten days; and a man on horseback had ridden up to the red brick house, with a despatch, wherein "Mr. and Mrs. Richard Hardman request the honour of Mr. and Mrs. Talbot at dinner, on Monday, the —th, at half-past eight o'clock." He was very forgiving.

CHAPTER V.

A DINNER AT THE TOWERS.

THE Towers, where the Hardmans lived, had belonged to the Tilley family, before Sir John had been obliged, from unsuccessful horse-racing, to sell the place and go abroad. It was a great red barrack of a house, with yellow copings and edgings, and white stone flower-pots on the top. The monetary soul of the rich man hungered for this place, and fancied it, when it came into the market, because "it had belonged to the Baronet." He already heard himself saying, in answer to some guest's inquiry, "Yes, I got this place when

the Tilleys broke up — Sir John, you know. I gave him a fine price for it. I lunched with him in this room, and he had his hands under my feet. 'I am a beggar,' he said; 'don't be hard on me.' 'No, Sir John,' I replied. 'I'll draw a cheque for the sum you wish.'"

This was the Hardman version—true in a literal way; but it was said, on the other hand, that the rich man had screwed and haggled, and wanted this in, and that in, and all the while kept off other purchasers. This, however may have been exaggeration; for the stories about Hardman were endless, and every one could contribute something about his arrogance, his "parvenu-ishness," and innate meanness of soul; for he had not bought or paid for tact, to hide these odious blemishes. A different

compliment to the well-known one paid to Mr. Burke could be paid to him; for you could not stand five minutes under an archway with him during a shower, without in some way getting the impression that he was one of the most offensive of men. There would be something in the way he handled his umbrella, or the way he would look out on the weather, as if it was some low "poor" creature that was coming in his road. He was giving these dinners, in the fancy that he was growing popular, but found far more secret pleasure in showing off his coarse magnificence. Mrs. Hardman was about as vulgar as he was, with an apparatus besides of noddings and bendings, which she took for graciousness and condescension. But they had a son and daughter who, strange to say, seemed wholly of another pattern. They did

not reflect the coarseness of mind, or manner of their sire and mamma. The daughter we have seen.

The Talbot carriage met several others returning as it rolled up the avenue. The door was open, and a blaze of light was shed forth, in which sheen appeared, standing as archangels of the household, the menials, in the Hardman canary colour and blue. During dinner more will be heard about these gentry. The procession went up the "grand stair," and was sung into the drawing-room, which was already pretty full.

Mr. Hardman came from off the rug—the royal tabaret, as it were—with his face still turned towards an old-fashioned gentleman, who was talking and illustrating something with his hands—and gave the new guests quite a mechanical greeting. Mrs. Hardman, however, welcomed

them with a fat and rubicund stateliness, as though she was some queen receiving. Mr. Talbot looked round the room to take a hasty view of the people who were assembled, and most of whom he knew. For the Honourable Mrs. Talbot there was, after the usual formula, a seat dug out, as it were, on the sofa, between other matrons, and the lovely Phœbe had sunk down on an ottoman, spreading out in vast billows of virgin silk, quite close to a tall, soldierly man, with grey moustaches.

The potentate upon the rug—and at every dinner there is a king—was a wiry, compact, high-shouldered gentleman, with a very tight, smooth face, a white tie without any creases, and that seemed to fasten behind a velvet collar and a wig. "And the most curious part of the whole," he was saying, "was that

the bishop never saw him again—never heard of him even!" And he turned and swayed on his heel from one side to the other, looking into every face. "Strange, wasn't it? Brindley told me that story himself." Chorus,—"Most singular!" "Oddest thing!" "So strange!" was murmured all round. Mr. Talbot knew that this was Lord Northfleet. "Ever hear how Brindley himself got Graves-end?" he went on, sharply. "A mere accident. Same name, you know, as the engineer—connected, of course, with the canal, and the Ellesmeres. The Premier once sat for the borough," &c. All this while Mr. Hardman was listening in the statesman attitude, his chin now high, now depressed, as he looked at his glazed feet, the lord clattering on with the most "curious" stories. With reluctance the host had to address himself to the almost

menial duty of assorting his guests, and in a haughty way bade each man take down each woman. A good-looking youth, with small, glossy moustache, and not more than eighteen, was led pompously to our Livy for her dinner companion, introduced as "My son," and it was just at that moment that Mrs. Talbot rose up with rustles and many smiles to greet the daughter of the house.

Any man of the world seeing the two ladies meet, would have read off the whole story with much amusement and interest, just as an experienced doctor would guess at the history of a whole case. The manufacturer's daughter came forward with a placid wariness, much as a man of business comes out from his office to see some importuning visitor who, he suspects, wants something. There was a calm coldness—combativeness in

ambuscade—a defence at all points, with a prospect of security. This gave to Mrs. Talbot's simpering courtesies an air of trepidation almost. The two ladies disliked each other; one, besides, despising, and the other fearing, that dull lump of coarse metal, her father, who, from constant grovelling before the molten calf, had grown into the image of one himself; and his coarse instinct was utterly insensible to any such fine-spun, and delicate currents of emotion about him. About Miss Hardman there was something remarkable. She carried herself well; she was really one of the company of "fine girls," as they are called, who, twenty years hence, turn out vast and portly women.

Every one wondered how Rosa Hardman had contrived to drive out of herself all trace of those two vulgar parents of

hers; but she had for the present, certainly; unless physical enemies, — skin, flesh, &c.,—should prove too much for her by-and-by. She had fine hair, and good eyes, which seemed her own very mind, for when she fixed them she gave the idea of search, and of question, and of deliberation, and of final decision. They seemed to say, "Ah, now! I see through your designs!" This thoughtful gaze no one much relished, still less her parents, who disliked their daughter, and had an uneasy feeling that she took the measure of their inferiority. Even such an uneasy feeling was in Mrs. Talbot's mind, as she retired to her sofa again. And when it had got abroad in the room, by a sort of gentle masonry, that the time had come, and every one was rustling about and seeking his own, in a sort of agitation, Mrs. Talbot, glancing in the

direction of her sister Phœbe, followed that maiden's look of consternation, and saw Colonel Labouchere and Miss Hardman passing down, joined together and not to be sundered for that evening.

At that moment the woman of the world seemed to read, as by an inspiration, a whole chronicle of what had taken place when she was not present—chapters upon chapters in the book of intrigue. To the deserted Phœbe came one of the supernumeraries of the party, called up from the rear,—a mere raw soldier, and Mrs. Talbot noted with pain her look of bewildered astonishment. For there is a sort of honourable understanding in these matters—a kind of delicate forbearance as to the matter of proprietorship. It was understood through the whole parish what designs the Talbot family entertained upon the stranger.

That dinner was like one of the banquets on an opera stage—the gold and the silver and finery were daubed on over the room, the table, and the picture-frames, much as the owner was inclined to embroider heavily his canary liveries. There was a vast deal of what seemed gold plate, huge silver urns, in the worst taste, under which the table groaned. It was, as some one said, like the prize table we see in a tent at a shooting match. The host and his lady sat well back, and scarcely spoke, but surveyed their own magnificence, like the theatrical kings and queens who preside at the banquets just alluded to. On the wall hung another host and hostess, with full as much gaudy paint heaped on as could be given for the money—he, with his hand under his waistcoat collar, his head back, his lips and chin drawn up, in the favourite expression,

"I am listening to your statement, sir; and am prepared with a reply to your worthless argument:" she in a rich flame-coloured silk, diamonds, and lace, full length; the red, full face, toned down into a lovely and "heightened" bloom,—indeed, one of the grossest pieces of pictorial subservience Bicknell, the artist, had yet been guilty of. It had been refused admittance to the walls of the Academy; "*owing to its size!*" Bicknell told the rich man, but told his friends quite another story. He would have been ashamed to have such a bit of millinery hung up with his name to it; but had made the "two vulgarians" pay fifty per cent. more for his putting in the dress at all.

Mrs. Talbot was seated opposite the daughter of the house, and before dinner was half over, had read full a volume and

a half of *that* story. It was a game, indeed, she had often played herself, and found a great piquancy in it. Just as our gallant sailors love what is called a "cutting out" expedition; and while they are preparing the blockade and bombardment of some great port or fort, they man the pinnace and keep up the spirits of the men by a bold capture of some little sloop or merchantman, under the very noses of the guns. There is not much profit on the whole—if successful, the prize is worthless; but it is a dashing achievement, and *annoys the enemy*. So, it seemed to her, had been the motive of the large, steadily gazing Rose Hardman, and who, when she looked, seemed to look in reply, coldly, "Well? I am as much entitled as *you*. This was *your* old game. You think because my mother and father are vulgar, and have bad taste, that their family are

to be considered inferior, and that mind and ability go for nothing?"

The unhappy Phœbe also had an uneasy feeling that this was a new enemy who had appeared on the scene, and who was a highly dangerous one. She had not been trained in the mere arts of *that* warfare, had no strategy, and knew not how to change her front, fall back, form square, or even advance. She required cavalry, that useful "arm" in the person of her sister, to charge and clear the ground for her. And thus the young supernumerary who had her in his keeping knew not what to make of her *distrait* and worried air, and the young gentleman returning home that night told his friends that he had been sent down with "a heavy lump of a girl that hadn't two words to say for herself."

Lord Northfleet was "in great vein"

that evening. His "curious" stories and odd observations charmed every one. His thoughts or investigations ran in the strangest gullies and courses.

"Did you ever hear," he was heard to ask, with a loud mysteriousness, "that Byron *left two sons?* I had it from the old dean near Newstead; so like him, too; one of them with a tendency to club-foot. Wasn't it strange? *He* said they went to America." Or about the late Duke of Wellington, "which was told me by the present Lord Huntinbrough, not long before the time of the battle of Waterloo. When he was in London, he received a mysterious letter, asking him to give the writer a meeting in one of those back slums behind Soho. He was enjoined secrecy, and bidden to come alone, and the writer said if he had courage she would show him, for it was a woman's hand, a paper con-

taining the plans of one who was his greatest enemy. Huntinbrough, who was going on his staff at the time, came in, and it was shown to him, and he said something about the waste-paper basket, as a matter of course, but the Duke said, in his quiet way, 'I mean to go.' Huntinbrough knew it was useless to remonstrate, but he said he was never in such a mortal terror, for it had all the air of what they call a regular plant."

Lord Northfleet had a clear gritty voice, and worked his sharp head briskly as he told a story, addressing a scrap to this one, another to that, no matter how far off, until he gradually drew in an audience. Everyone was now listening. Mr. Hardman very proud.

"The Duke rode down to Soho; got down, threw the reins to a *gamin*, who was standing about, and went in to one

of the most cut-throat places you could conceive. He came home very grave and serious. It is supposed, and Hutinbrough had reason to know," the lord added, dropping his voice, and a salt spoon might have been heard to drop as he spoke, "that she was a former—you know—of the Emperor's. I believe what he heard there had something to do with the gaining of the battle!"

The host looked up and down the table, and it seemed as though his chin were about to retire for ever within his white tie, and be never seen again. His air was as who should say pompously to the guests, "See, what I have provided for you, a real lord, telling such curious stories, not the common sort of article, stories out of the newspapers, and all that, but real rare things you won't meet every day." The servants, in obedience to a haughty

sign, refrained from movement or clatter; the magic sounds, "Duke of Wellington," "Lord Huntinbrough," had the influence of a charm. Mr. Hardman spoke later of the great "tact" of Bewley, his butler, who had come to him from Lord Trueman, at Trueman's Court. The coachman, too, who had come from the Duke, was also seen hovering about, disdainfully making himself inefficient, haughtily standing afar off, listening with refined enjoyment, in what was a stiff robe that flowed about his limbs.

Beauty Talbot had fallen, as it were, upon clover pastures. A young girl, fresh, *naïve*, countrified, such as French novelists rave of as *délicieuse* and of a *fraicheur ravissant*. This little sapling was enchanted with the good-looking and agreeable gentleman who took her down, listening with a shy smile and scarcely contained

enjoyment to all that he told her, *of himself*. Not for long had he such a listener; for on average occasions he was given a trained married lady, who knew and was pretty tired of all the tricks of the little human comedy, and would have made the little girl "of the delicious *fraicheur*" stare by her criticism of "that vapid creature Talbot." He was quite happy, and told her all about himself, and his ways and likings. To him, indeed, a new object was almost essential, and to whom everything he could say was fresh. With those who knew him, or had met him often, he found "he wanted spring," and soon collapsed into dulness. He would return home quite in spirits, and his lady there would listen with interest to his recital of his great success. It kept him in spirits for a day; and, as she took care he should not meet the object that had so gratified

him again, the whole presently passed out of his mind.

Thus the dinner went on, vastly enjoyed by the supernumeraries and by the grand host, who looked down on his own pride and pomp, spoke very little, save an allusion to Lord Kelldrum, or to "the duke" from whom he got his coachman; and this card he had learned to play with what might be called "a clumsy adroitness." Thus. Lord Northfleet is telling a most singular thing about Madox, the expert. "Had noticed on a receipt the curious fact, writer bent his r's backwards. A year afterwards called at a trial—paper put into his hand, and remembered r's bent back. It was ten years before. Man hanged on the strength of this evidence."

Mr. Hardman (seeing the opportunity), "The best handwriting I ever saw in my life is that of the Duke's, so fine, clear,

bold, and distinct for a man of his age. You know him, of course, Lord Northfleet?"

Mrs. Talbot, sitting beside this golden calf, could not but glance with a smile of significance and amusement at a neighbour of hers, a gentleman of great intelligence and quietness. But the next moment she felt a gaze steadily fall upon her with a cold challenge and defiance, as much as to say, "I am on the alert. Well, what discovery have you made? It is surely not polite—certainly at *our* table—to sneer at your host." The next moment Mrs. Talbot saw those eyes turned to their neighbour, Colonel Labouchere, and from him to Beauty Talbot, and from the last to Mrs. Talbot, from whom both the Colonel and Miss Hardman, surprised as it were in an unlawful glance, turned away. From the common language of

women who are hostile to each other, Mrs. Talbot knew perfectly that the disparity between the ages of herself and her husband—her rock ahead, the "heel" of hers that was vulnerable—had been the subject of that whisper. That was indeed a most fatal and certain sign of the defection of the Colonel. For the sake of the new love, a man will ungratefully sacrifice on the spot, to gain the merest point, the most cherished allies, very much to their astonishment. Phœbe, also, afar off, saw that all seemed well-nigh lost.

Now, however, the ladies are moving up-stairs to assemble in their private sanhedrim. There it may be suspected it is as difficult for a woman to "hold her own" and take "position," as for a man to hold his own in the House of Commons. The "great lady" of the meeting has a strange power, which an inferior of the

same sex dare not do battle against, after the republican fashion in which an inferior male can stand up against a leading man in a society. With them there is more equality, and the lower being can assert himself even roughly, while the man of rank or genius is content, and too proud to struggle for superiority.

But the haughty and insipid lady, superior in *ton*, rank, and languor (and these arms are hers)—who will not condescend to do battle, how shall the unwieldy, flaming vulgarian contrive to approach her? That manner wins respect and allies. Those sitting round are drawn by it to support the chieftainess. This high office Mrs. Talbot took up at once when she reached the drawing-room, and the obsequious hostess rolled, as it were, to her feet. The great lady might be thinking of something else: she had not forgotten her old

days, when she had to fight her way through the crowd before she had attained the honours of the tabaret.

Thus enthroned, a queen of light,—the rustic ladies of the district grouped about her, a few light girls talking eagerly together at a distance, yet stealing sly and reverential glances—Mrs. Talbot "presided," and gave her little senate laws in a low, sweet murmur of gentility, which she had no reason to pitch in a higher key—a softly melodious monologue—which by the art of her training had no air of selfish monopoly or vulgar personality. The great idol in human flesh, that seemed incompressible, almost determined to escape from the frail tracery of tulle and silks, Mrs. Hardman sat near her, on rolling billows of cushion, a huge swollen wave. She was content to listen and distend her lips in rich smiles of admiration.

It was only when Mrs. Talbot's eye rested on the daughter of the house, who sat near her, as though under a compulsion of respect, that she grew a little uneasy. That cold look, seemed to say, "all this loftiness does well enough among the people who are listening to you, but not for me, on whom you impose about as much as the fine clothes of an actor upon an old playgoer." The retired soldier "itched" for battle, yet at the same time dreaded it. Something, however, drew her on.

Mrs. Talbot could not be rude, or ill-bred to honest vulgarity; Mrs. Hardman was so grotesquely "common," that she could only smile at her. It would have been simply cruel to have been insolent to her; but there was such a challenge in the eyes of the girl opposite that she could not resist sacrificing

her good breeding and delicacy. The hostess spoke of some of the rich properties of the house—the paper splashed and daubed with gold bunches of flowers, and fenced in with great bars of superfluous moulding. The decorators and finishers had also hoisted up vast beams, or booms, of gold—perhaps with cranes —from which hung enormous mainsails of the richest figured silk known to the market, and which would take a whole crew to "draw" or furl. The same artists had filled the room with huge buhl structures. Mrs. Hardman told how "she had left it all to Towerson and Jones."

"Left it all to them?" repeated Mrs. Talbot, with a smile; "ah, *that* explains it!"

It is curious what a retribution there is in these things; and how, where there is no restraint, punishment is sure to fol-

low. Mrs. Talbot little dreamed what trouble this unlucky vendetta into which she was rushing was storing up for her. On this hint, which always gave her an eternal fluency, Mrs. Hardman began to pour out details: how Towerson himself had come down and stayed a week, superintending; and how, in short, "they had left it all to him." The drawing-room was done exactly "the same as the duke's"—the nobleman who had supplied the famous coachman. Though, indeed, had the latter been called up to give his testimony as to the exact reproduction of the ducal drawing-room, he would have contemptuously dismissed any sense of likeness, with a declaration, "it were no more like than a bay 'orse is to a grey."

"Like the duke's!" said Mrs. Talbot, not to Mrs. Hardman, but to Miss Hard-

man. "Oh! then that is conclusive as to its taste."

"You, of course, mean its bad taste," said Rosa, coldly. "I understand you; for you could not mean to say that a nobleman is guaranteed against bad taste, *because* he is a nobleman."

Mrs. Talbot coloured, drew her lace shawl up, and rattled her ornaments. She shook her head helplessly.

"I merely use the common English language," she said, "and ordinary words. My poor head cannot follow all these refinements."

"There *is* too much ornament," went on the girl; "far too much heavy gold and gaudiness; yet we know that large rooms of this sort require this heavy style of decoration. We did not know much of the style usual in the noble houses, so we could only follow precedent and what

was told to us. Hence we fell into the mistake of adopting the duke's model. We only deserve pity, but you must not condemn."

"Pity!" repeated her mother wondering, yet with an instinct that Rosa was at some of her usual absurd philosophy. "Ah, child, what folly you talk! Who wants to pity, or to condemn?"

"Well, you *have* my pity, with all my heart," said Mrs. Talbot, with a pretty simper; "and as much of it as you can want." And the rustic ladies sitting round, though scarcely understanding, saw that there was "sparring" going on, and were delighted to show by obsequious smiles that the lady of rank and fashion hit far away the best.

Miss Hardman seemed to smile good-humouredly.

"But surely you are amusing yourself

with us when you say that the taste of a duke, or, I suppose you mean, of the aristocracy, is a safe guide, if the things be true that we hear. The fine ladies who take up rich but inferior people for payment——"

The curl on Mrs. Talbot's lip was as though she had seen a reptile crawling towards her.

"Payment! Where have you heard such stories? If indeed you consult the penny papers——"

"I mean," said Rosa, "those who take up, as it is called, the low, rich person, and in return for the opera-boxes, carriages, dinners, and perhaps houses, ask a few nice people—surely *that* is payment. Taste, indeed! What models to follow! There are fine ladies up in town, I have been told, who do not disdain to go to the parties of those they think beneath

them—to sit at their tables, use them for their own convenience, and then will sneer, and turn the foolish creatures into ridicule for their fine friends. There is worse taste in the world than overloading rooms with gilding and decoration!"

Mrs. Hardman rolled on her cushions in great trouble. She thought her daughter taking leave of her senses. The looks of Mrs. Talbot told her that that lady was being hurt—insulted—in some mysterious way, which she could not follow.

"For shame, Rosa!" she said. "What you say, Mrs. Talbot, is so right, and I am sure you know best about the duke, and we could not be wrong in following him."

CHAPTER VI.

IN THE DRAWING-ROOM.

Now the door opens undecidedly, as under undecided hands, yet such as would outpour blessings on all the world. "The gentlemen were coming up!" That blessing, too long denied, was to be restored. Below, their ears had been dinned by the coarse trumpeting of the gentleman who was entertaining them. It was "the duke's coachman," over and again, and in a most ingenious variety of shapes. Those fine grapes—the duke's coachman—*i.e.*, Sir J. Shortall has the same. Those silver branches, so tall and spreading in their foliage, that a small guest could repose

under it, and literally find shelter from the tropical glare of the Hardman gas—— Duke's coachman again. "Alcock had supplied the identical fellow to it" to one of the royal princes. These dessert-plates, in the shape of scallop-shells, the duke's coachman explained *their* presence also; through some mysterious channel, the host had discovered that that "identical pattern" had been chosen as a wedding present for the beautiful and high-born Lady Amelia Winter. They would have found out for themselves, without the assistance of this eternal coachman, that it was tolerable claret which had been set before them, but for the wearying proclamation of their vapouring host—"Bulmer sent me that; I gave him his own terms. He divided the lot with the duke, his royal highness, and with me. Just our three

cellars. In six years, every glass will be worth a guinea."

"D—n his swagger," said one of the gentlemen, with rude hunting manners, very far down, to his neighbours. "This ain't an auction room. He don't want us to bid for his wine, does he?"

But some of the more rustic were vastly impressed, and, by an instinct, even disbelievers and judges began to sip, in a juryman-like way, and smack their lips, and shake their heads.

We have not yet arrived at that beginning of wisdom which shall make us indulge in our rare and delicate wines, not at the end of many courses, and of sauces and sweets, but at the beginning, with an unvitiated palate. His lordship does not much care, though he knows a good glass of wine. He has a story about the late Bishop of

——, "poor old Stinger—when some workmen broke into what proved to be an old cellar, stocked by his grandfather—perhaps the best connoisseur of his day. The son thought he had drank it all out, when they came on this find. The late General Dobbs went to dine with him,—scenting a good thing, you know,—and, to his disgust, found the common poor stuff set down before him. You know they were notorious at the palace for bad wine; even the curates could hardly be got to drink it, though they knew, poor devils, what depended on it."

"'But surely,' says Dobbs, literally making a face as he took the first glass, this can't be——'

"'Oh, that old stuff,' says Stinger, the old stager; 'it had no body in it. I got them to change with me at the hospital.'"

The "gentlemen" being now dispersed in skirmishing order about the room, the usual business of that season was going forward. The three or four elders or prophets — lean pantaloons, unslippered for the occasion—were clustered in the back drawing-room, their heads together, jerking like birds over a fountain, talking in pleasant confidence. For those old souls, so red of face, so inflamed in eye, this is one of the few pleasures left; and it is wonderful how, with all their other organs so palpably perishing, this last sense of relish remains with them. Such veterans we see dining out to the last, taking their wines and rich dishes where far younger men are cautious.

His lordship was still in a circle on the rug, whispering his little story, which seemed an extract from some old scan-

dalous memoir. "It was notorious the likeness of young Boothby to the old Dean of Cheltenham. Same eyes, same nose, eh? Well, there were reasons for that likeness. Dean was tutor, when a young man, at poor Lady Jane Boothby's, and an uncommon good-looking fellow then; and she must take lessons in Latin from the tutor. An old housekeeper saw what was going on; and he was quietly *chassé*. Never knew so sensible a fellow as the Dean."

The rest of the room was, indeed, an encampment. Mr. Hardman was very happy. His whole full-length came down from the frame; and, stalking about, he felt something like a minister who had thrown open his rooms, was receiving, and felt it his duty to go about from guest to guest, "to make every one feel at his ease," though no one seemed to

value, or sometimes even to notice, such attentions. He was proud of having as his guest such a distinguished woman as "the Honourable Mrs. Talbot," and was unusually gracious to an obscure stranger or two, as there was an opportunity of explaining to them who she was.

His eye, however, rested with some displeasure on his son, who was in an effusion of boyish adoration before the pretty daughter of Mrs. Talbot—a foolish and unprofitable proceeding, the lad only making himself "ridiculous with such follies." The Honourable Mrs. Talbot was one thing, but her daughter was quite another; and there were so many rich young fellows, with expectations, who presently *would* destroy their father's plans by rushing off and marrying mere paupers. For the scion of his house he had quite other designs; and he could

not even allow of any foolish waste of time in such matters. It was irreverence for the great purpose of life and his vocation. By and by, when he had cemented intimacies with many persons of rank, he intended making an arrangement—seated in his cabinet-minister attitude, behind his papers, despatch boxes, &c.—with some noble person for a daughter. This would conduce to *his* influence and position. It was an incident in the important career he saw fast opening before him. That picture of himself in black, his hand under his waistcoat—perpetually gliding about gilded and gorgeous drawing-rooms — an eternal host, as it were—was always before him. It was with a sort of arrogant rudeness that he called off his son.

"Here, sir! have you no duties in my house to do? Chattering folly in this

style! You'll never learn. Go, and attend to my guests, sir; you have no manners!"

And yet, had this son been forward in company in attending to the leading guests, his father would have rudely thrust him aside, telling him he was "infernal officious," and took too much on himself. "He'd have him know his place, and that he wasn't master of that house quite, yet." Such is the inconsistency of arrogance.

The gentle Phœbe had taken up a sort of advanced post near the door, so as to have a desperate chance of cutting off her warrior. The colonel was a gentleman, but quite an old campaigner in many senses. He had "hacked about" from garrison to garrison, and "knew girls and their tricks by heart." Had he really been originally taken by the attractive Phœbe,

and was now turned away from her, or had he been merely paying her those gracious civilities with which a selfish man must fill up his time and amuse himself on a desert island? Or had Phœbe, too sanguine, coloured up into gorgeous pictures what was merely indifferent? It is hard to tell. It is certain that the colonel was detained by that daring outpost only a few seconds (who was alert, bold, and hazardous in her advances), and then was seen to break away; "to escape," as he ill-naturedly would have said, and make for her with the large eyes. An experienced matrimonial physician, who conducted "cases" of that sort, if called in, would have pronounced, after a hopeless glance at the patient, that "all that" was nearly over, and that human skill could avail little or nothing. The patient, alas! would be

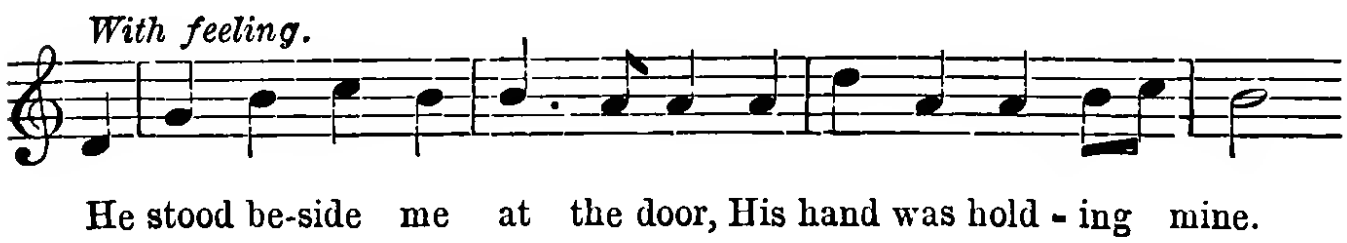
the last to see this, or to know her danger.

Now the Honourable Mrs. Talbot is called over to the piano. Everyone is round, pressing the Beauty to give one of his "little" songs; though why they were so styled, being of the same length and pretensions as others, it was difficult to say. The young "nursery" girl was the most eager, the author himself was the least disinclined; indeed the music was actually below in the hall, enwrapped somewhere in his coat, and he looked about for his wife and faithful accompanyist.

Immediately she had glided to the piano. There was all but a silence, save in the voice of Lord Northfleet, who was afar off on the rug of the next room, telling a clergyman, in low, confidential tones, with other admirers, a strange

story he heard from the late Bishop of the Leeward Isles. Looks of expostulation were turned towards him; but, in truth, his lordship looked on music much as he did on the noise of the tea cups and spoons which the footmen had been bringing round — a disagreeable accompaniment, but still not enough to interfere with conversation.

So the Beauty begins in a faint, delicate voice, but with an air as though he were a Mario, his head back, his soft eyes languishing towards the nursery young lady. He is very particular as to the accompaniment. It was called, "He gave one last and lingering smile." Words and music by A. Talbot, Esq, It ran something to this effect:—

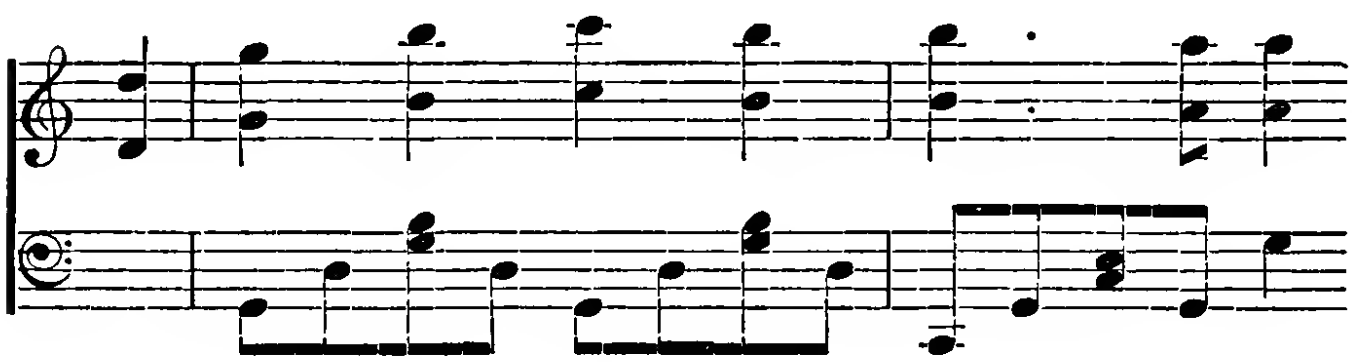


He stood beside me at the door,
His hand was holding mine,
The waiting carriage o'er and o'er
They'd called along the line.

Oh, lips so arched! oh, glossy hair!
Ah, look that knows not guile!
I could not go—we could not part:
He gave one lingering smile,
One smile,
One smile.
One last and lingering smile.

This line he addressed point-blank to the lustre, as though he could not trust himself to look lower. Mrs. Talbot, always nervous in accompanying the Beauty's songs, had hurried a little too much at the end, and received a hoarse whispered reproof, which was perceived by all; and many, ignorant of music, felt that she was not quite up to the thing. It is surprising, indeed, how easily the good-natured player is sacrificed to the

selfishness of the one he serves; and the singer who has failed will be sure, by a look of reproach, to throw the whole blame on the innocent assistant. As the intermediate symphony moved on, there was a sharp recitative from the next room.



("The bishop said to him, 'My good man, I can do nothing for you, I really can't.' And who do you suppose this apparent beggar turned out to be?" &c.)

Every one was conventionally charmed at this melody and the words of the little incident, which seemed to be a picture drawn from the singer's own experience. Some of the men looked at each other privately, with a tendency to grimace, as who should say, "What fun this

Beauty was." But they were under the influence of the society, and dared not openly be contemptuous. Even as he finished, the unauthorised recitative fell on the last chord with a jar.

("I can tell you he never would open his lips to the bishop again.")

There was one certainly who might have played for him with more effect, but Livy would not have interfered with this pet and special department of her mother's. The young officer, the son of the house, was greatly attracted by her—as indeed who was not likely to be?—having devoted himself to her during the dinner, and told her all about himself—one of the fashions in which our poor human nature believes it is favourably impressing others. Yet, as has been mentioned, the wretched "Birmingham plating" of the father and mother was not overlying his soul, that

cold, showy, glittering, and worthless ware which his odious parents were flashing in everybody's eyes. How he escaped having such an ornament bound up in his system, cramping and tightening his feelings and sympathies, was a marvel. But he could talk, and talk with the pleasantness of a young fellow not yet spoiled or grown affected. Livy was amused and interested, and showed that she was interested. Nature has always this certain spell; but nature also, or perhaps the complacent personality of selfishness, makes the manly heart mistake such indulgence for something belonging to "Love's kingdom." He was quite delighted with himself, and in the mood for being rallied, quizzed, punched on the chest, or treated to any of those shapes of compliments with which men greet their brothers in such cases. He had

not seen much garrison service, but had encountered many a garrison girl—irregular horse of the drawing-room—those forward, loud ladies of industry, who are in their own ranks pretty much as are barmaids, and their manners, in a lower one. Miss Livy was to his eyes quite of another pattern. And indeed these creatures who come spurring up to men quite boldly in rooms, challenging them to this and that, have their use as foils to their perfect sisters.

But all were now about moving, when the Colonel showed signs that his cruel, stony heart had been softened, and came over to the lorn and lone Phœbe. He was all smiles and good-nature, and it must be said quite unconscious of his previous baseness.

"You have heard," he said, "what we are going to do? Our officers want to

give a series of Wednesday dances. You come, as a matter of course. I ask you, and won't send even a formal invitation."

The slightest signs of grace in these cases, makes the most outrageous past be forgotten. The downcast face beamed again with smiles and trust. Is it love that does this? love that forgives, trusts all, and hopes for all, or simply a sense of mistake, an acknowledgment that what had passed meant nothing; a decorous self-interest which is content to overlook all and begin again fairly, provided there is a sincere change of conduct? Into these niceties we need not pry; but the result was the hopeful Phœbe went down to the carriage with the old dreams before her eyes. There was the usual procession, Mr. Hardman leading, with Mrs. Talbot and his enraptured son still with her daughter. "Now you will

be sure to come to the dance. I count upon you, and I know you will enjoy it."

Mr. Hardman while sweeping across his own hall in this function always seemed to himself ducal rather, and almost ancestral. He was the lord of the house seeing "his guests" out. He was particular that all "his menials" should be mustered about that time, so as to impress the departing guests. It gave a baronial air. Phœbe, happiest of women, was waited on by the Colonel. True, the keener eye of Mrs. Talbot had noted that he was going away also, and that the lamps of his little "trap" were flashing in the open door; but we must not search too narrowly, or look these rare gift horses too jealously in the mouth. Double motives may, and do, accompany many an act in life; interest may go with inclination, in the most convenient way;

but the sensible person will accept the satisfactory result. She got into her carriage elated. But what goaded her really was the insolence, the air of command, the victory even "of that low woman," and who seemed to hint at something to be in the future. A sort of claim for dominion,—a low manufacturer's girl, about, as it were, "to contest the county" with her, the queen of the district.

In that girl's eyes there was a challenge, and a venomous one. The whole party, the low rich man, and airs of money and show, were simply contemptible, not in the least dangerous. Not indeed that she had much care about social pre-eminence now; but there was something in those steady eyes that meant even more. These were her thoughts as she found herself in her drawing-room,

taking off her gold and silver armour before the glass. Beauty Talbot looked up from his own personal reverie; and coming fresh from that gew-gaw house and coarse finery, may have been struck by the contrast; the air of refinement and breeding, in that well-shaped face and delicate arms, above all in the dress, which was a master-piece of design and execution. The first was her own, and the wealth of the Hardmans could not have got quite the same touches. Whether he thought this or no, he was looking at her, and the watchful Livy, full of delight, saw him and struck in, "*Doesn't* she look well, Beauty, after those people!"

With some little enthusiasm — it reflected praise on him, his property—the Beauty answered, "Really, yes, she is quite handsome to-night."

The lady looked round on both with

a smile, her elbow on the chimney-piece, her arm and wrist arched. So might Bicknell have painted her for the Academy. The delicate green of her dress, and the lace, would have worked up finely. The Beauty was in good humour, his humour always giving the tone to his little society.

The party in that small travelling chamber had travelled home very happily. Mrs. Talbot was a little silent. She had a *conviction* that for Phœbe the day *was* lost. There was all the trouble they had taken, the labour, the positive hard work, all spent for nothing.

CHAPTER VII.

"OLD DICK LUMLEY."

On the next day there was still a palpable gloom over the ladies' side of the household. There were councils and consultations. Of these Mr. Talbot was quite unobservant, being in good spirits and good humour. He was pleased with his performances of the night before. Mrs. Talbot had an air of trouble and dissatisfaction. Perhaps it was founded on the idea that in that house she must not seem to be defeated in anything, or by anyone. She was "thorough" in all things; a gallant creature that would do battle to the last with years, and the

mean little shabby attacks of old Time's toadies and jackals — namely, wrinkles, fading colour, loss of hair, teeth, &c.— fight them inch by inch, repairing the damage until, as the good-natured "Old Dick Lumley" said, who often dined with them, "She would all crumble and collapse one fine morning, like the one-horse shay." To be defeated in that little corner of their county, and by a "low" girl, meant a defeat in her own house, in her own rooms. She knew how slight was the allegiance of her own troops, of that domestic force which she had to try and turn out, and keep from insubordination. At any moment there might have been a revolt, which only endless watchfulness could prevent. He, too, though not much interested in so slight an affair, and one that did not concern him, had been led to believe in

certain victory, and would be sure to harp on the defeat as something that showed him wiser than anyone else.

That day, also, was to be a day of new disaster and discouragement, for about noon arrived a letter from Colonel Labouchere, with many regrets that he could not present himself at lunch on some particular day, "as he had forgotten that he had engaged himself at The Towers." When this news came, Phœbe flung the letter down passionately, as though the game were up, and with tears in her eyes said she would go away that very evening. Mrs. Talbot was biting her lips, and her foot was patting on the carpet.

"I have a trifle more spirit than that," she said. "She shall come to your feet, Phœbe, and beg your pardon yet."

"She!" repeated the other, in amazement. "Who do you mean?"

Mrs. Talbot was not thinking of the lover, nor of the gentleman they wished to make into a lover.

"That low girl—that fellow's daughter. Can't you see it is against *me* she means all this? She wants to raise that family of hers by their money; she wants to make them the first people in this part of the county. But she shall not depose me, if I die for it."

Here entered Livy, and just caught these last words.

"Depose you, dearest; you who look so magnificent and so like your picture this morning?" And she smoothed her mother's golden hair softly, and kissed her on the forehead, as if she were a younger and petted sister. The picture was of the now exploded Chalon pattern—

faint, delicate water colouring—celestial, diaphanous floating in the air, as the chief artists of that school loved to present their heroines.

This, indeed—done in the full heyday of her charms, when she was "in the service," and, a colonel-like belle—was always the standard of comparison used by this faithful soldier. It was amazing, indeed, considering the interval of years, how little difference there was between the two. In fact, the picture had not lasted nearly so well. It was her mirror, and she consulted it as often as the one on her dressing-table. Pale, faint, pink, delicate watery blue, jewels, laces, floating away in the breeze—it can now be seen engraved in an old Book of Beauty.

Towards five o'clock Mr. Talbot came forth, and said he would stroll down and meet "Old Dick Lumley," who was com-

ing out by the train about that time. He took his daughter with him, as a matter of convenience, just as he would have taken down his hat or his umbrella. He fell into this, not from any profound affection, paternal or otherwise, but from simple habit. He could not endure walking alone, and she, affectionately artful, contrived to be as adroitly flattering in her innocent adulation of his looks and gifts as some old courtier, and had at least the merit of putting him in good humour.

On the road, when they got to the top of the hill, they saw a small figure in a light grey shooting-coat and garden-hat trotting briskly towards them. Any one might have said, "Here is some officer from the garrison—some young active fellow." Afar off he took off his hat, and waved it cheerily like a Jack Tar, then

broke into a jerky run. This was "Old Dick Lumley" coming up, whom every one about town knew well, and whom people could take any number of affidavits, and prove by documents, to be at least seventy-six years old, and yet as young as any boy in the country.

"Old Dick Lumley" was in the same office (Board of Green Cloth at Buckingham Palace) with Mr. Talbot. He had originally filled the strange office of "Gentleman at Large" at Dublin Castle, where there are as many curious little court berths as at some German Pumpernickel, had hung on under various viceroys, and had at last been "discharged with all wages paid him," as a malicious snarler of the place said. This sort of pleasant grasshopper is quite a species; it chirrups with delight about the daisies and buttercups which have "handles to their names."

Sometimes they allowed him to nibble at their leaves, and one obtained him this "little berth," which came in very satisfactorily. He had been in the service of Rank, "from his childhood, man and boy," for years. In that dear campaigning he had accepted halfpence, kicks, rebuffs, snubs, actual privations; yet still would not have exchanged the life for *plebeian* ease and luxury. It was the only air that suited his old lungs.

To "Dublin Castle" had been always coming a stream of visitors, more or less aristocratic, and these the "Gentlemen at large" duly breathed, inhaled, felt, and patted all over. He adhered to them like mussels. He would have been glad to do menial offices for them, would they have permitted him. He never let them "go" afterwards, waited on them in town, trained himself to be amusing, prattling,

and useful, and at last got recognised—the *grand point.* To be recognised was to be found at *other* houses; an argument to you for having him at *yours.* About society flutter many of these little insects, *chiffoniers* of gossip, who are repaid for their really useful labours by admission to the more select shows. Ten minutes with a baronet is a lunch; five with a lord, a good dinner.

But there was another side to "Old Dick Lumley's" character, more human, for which we may have some sympathy. Like Mrs. Talbot, he was doing battle with Time, decay, weakness, and had fought even more successfully than she had done. No one ever knew him to be ill; he never allowed himself to be ill. It might be suspected that he withdrew to some lone garret, where no one could see him. There was no stooping, no decay, no ne-

glect; yet his age was undoubted. His dress was more surprising still,—like that of a man of five-and-twenty, and even more gay. As Mr. Talbot and his daughter came down the hill, they saw him glittering in his bright blue tie and still brighter face. In his voice there was a metallic ring, not the wheeze of old age, and in his eye a roguish twinkle.

"Here I am! come down to you, and made out a day at last. Ah, Miss Livy, I wish you had been at Lady Mantowers' last night. They wanted beauty, I can tell you—a set of ogresses. Well, Talbot, I am so glad to meet you."

On this, "Old Dick Lumley" launched out into an account of his doings, just as a political man might unfold quite a budget of important news. He walked so fast and briskly, they could hardly keep up with him, while his voice left them

a long way behind. Livy delighted in listening to him—she thought so at least; but the reason more likely was, that she saw he was so welcome to both her father and mother. A visit from him introduced new vitality into the house, and kept *him* in pleasant acceptance of the existing order of things.

In the little round library—cosiest of regions, and which became infinitely more so during the dark hour before dinner—they found the ladies sitting at the fire, arrayed in what might be called the elegant regimental undress kept for that hour of the day. The iron grey of the evening was seen outside, through the windows, with the twinkle of the lamps from the passing coach or cart; while a shaded lamp in the corner spread a quiet half-light over the colours and properties in the room. Presently Old Dick Lumley

was in a little low chair—not by any means an "arm" one, which he left to the "old" men—sitting at the feet of the ladies, "amusing them so much." He unpacked all his little boxes and bundles rapidly, telling them of this country house and of that, where he had put up, as at a series of inns, and where he "picked up" people: with stories of "nice Lady Grace," and "dear Lady Mary," which are in a certain degree welcome, and which elevate our humanity and complacency, provided there be no object of self-glorification on the side of the relator. With such aid the time slipped by pleasantly, until dinner came.

These little entertainments "Beauty" Talbot knew how to do very well—so his friends said. Rather he himself could talk about what had been arranged, with quite an air of authorship. Yet it was

the skilful forethought of his daughter—even her more skilful touch—that contrived the whole. She could even believe—though a partial filial delusion—that he had contrived the whole. Everything was small, hot, choice; everything came up swiftly, by "a lift;" and a neat-handed Phyllis waited. No ancient stomach appreciated these rare qualities so sincerely and gratefully as that of Old Dick Lumley. It oiled the very wheels of his elocution.

"Now this *is* wonderfully good. The last time I had such a *vol au vent* as this was at Linderston, where, I assure you, we all suspected that Lady Linder's own fair fingers had—now, don't smile, Miss Livy—had held the fork, or whatever it was. It is now coming up a good deal among our fine ladies, is cookery. You know Lady Emily St. Luke's little book—

the prettiest thing in the world—she gave me a copy herself—"Toothsome Things"—not bad as a title! We had a regular consultation over it, your humble servant in the chair, and they did me the honour to approve of mine. 'If you were but one of the dishes, Lady Emily!' I said. That carried it."

This was a specimen of Dick Lumley's "powers," as he would have called i— his style, as it were. As in Lady Emily's cookery, the chief elements were the seasonings, condiments, essences, garnishings—not the vulgar meats and poultry—so the chief strength of his talk lay in the garnishing of good names which he sprinkled thickly over it. He was going to Brierly next week, where there were to be theatricals; and, "only think," they had got the duke to take a part! Lady Whitman could make him do anything.

The week after, there were to be great doings at Greenhunt—the son, you know, coming of age. Next month there was Lady Susan's marriage with Longacre, of the Guards. Lucky dog !

So he proceeded with this fashionable diary, which he would be delighted to keep pencilling it day after day, as if he was just starting in life, until one morning or night, a skinny, strong, hand was to be put over his shoulder, and snatch it from him.

He asked about their life down there.

"I heard there was a manufacturing man set up here. Just like 'em, daubing on the splash and colour, and all that; as Dudley said, the other day, very happily, too, they'd paint and varnish their houses in panels, like Lord Mayors' carriages, with arms and gold, if they could. Dreadful people, my dear Miss

Livy. They've such a coarse touch, you see. Their money is positively worth to them about one-fourth of what it is to us decently-born people. They don't know how to use it, and," added Old Dick Lumley, dropping his voice mysteriously, as if he was about to announce a secret of the cabala, "you'll mark that in the way *they give to the servants*, you know. I give you my honour, Baker, Lord Greenman's valet—a house absolutely like an hotel all the year round—told me he'd sooner have a gentleman's shilling than your Manchester person's guinea."

Mrs. Talbot listened with pleasure.

"For anything I have seen of them, they are terrible. I really can't understand them. You may pity us here."

"Not a bit," said Mr. Lumley, heartily. "It will be a little excitement. You can snub 'em and snub 'em again:

all before the neighbours, too, which gives a whet. *That's* true luxury, as Lady Towler used to say. They *will* go blundering on, daubing their plate and money about in their disgusting way. Now, I'll tell you what occurred a year and a half ago, at Strachey's, over in the wilds of Ireland, where Lady Emma Strachey had asked *rather* a mixture, between ourselves; but we all knew what it was for—to get Strachey *in*. 'All the parsons, you know, and that sort of thing. Heavy as dumplings! Ah! ah! Miss Livy. *What* a Macedonian! If there be a thing I adore—but there's an artistic touch about *this*—and I must have some of that old East India with it."

This was one of the secrets of Old Dick Lumley's vitality — he always eat the best and choicest things that were served, taking care to dine at what he

called *guaranteed* houses, where there were notorious cellars, cooks, &c. Once give Dick Lumley a bad dinner and his active tongue gave the author a bad name for ever. He seemed to think that thus had been shortened his fag end of a life, by some days or hours.

"Well now, to come back to our *foie gras*—for old Lord Hartop used to say, they might have chosen a real delicacy when they went about it, and not vulgar sheep. Well, I want to tell you about my adventure at Strachey. It will amuse you all." And Old Dick Lumley smiled and smacked his lips, and showed white and even teeth, and took all the party in at a glance, to see that he had their attention—a regular prologue and manœuvre of his before beginning a choice story.

"A very good house, I assure you,"

he went on, apologising for Ireland; "things very well done, you know — groom of the chamber, and all that. She was a Greenman: took a fancy to Strachey, and quite formed him. Well, there was a sort of manufacturing girl, who came over with some one—just in the way that class of girl is brought to keep things lively. Webster says it's a regular profession, and a host who has to fill his house two or three times in the year, is very glad to hear of these supernumeraries, who know the business, and go to anyone and for anything. 'Ah, Miss Talbot, that astonishes you. Well, Strachey did the thing uncommonly well — good style, and all that; but that was Lady Emma, you know, who really had tact, and knew how to mix her company, and bring the right people together."

(Mr. Lumley spoke as if some delicious beverage was being compounded before him.)

"There were a good many of the Irishry—Lord Mountattic; Sir Hercules Jackson; a man who called himself, God knows why, The O'Daly; Lord and Lady Boreena; more Irish; and St. Maurice; with a few of us English, you know, to keep the mass sweet. Ha! ha!"

Like some of his countrymen, old Lumley was fond of speaking in a contemptuous way of this class of his fellow subjects.

"We had very fair shooting," he went on; "and good horses, and I had really some very pleasant drives about with Lady Boreena, who, by the way, asked me to go and see them at Boreen whenever it suited me. I declare I never thought of it until this moment! The

first slack time, I have I must put in at Boreen. Ha ! ha !"

Olivia was more interested in the dramatic part of the story; saw that her mother was, and brought him back to the subject. Sometimes "the old man part" would overpower him ; and people said that "Old Dick Lumley" took a fit of rambling.

"Well, the manufacturing young lady, Mr. Lumley ?" she said.

"Oh, yes. I had my eye on her the whole time ; and I assure you it was worth it ; a kind of demure creature, but with an air of business. There was a genuine Irish barrister there—a rough, forward, amusing fellow—who fell head and ears in love with her. I believe she had a fancy for him, too ; he had met her somewhere before, at some other house, and had actually got himself invited here.

"Well, they were giving a ball, and some officers came out for it with their colonel, a man whose face and name I remember perfectly. Fotheringham the name, and he had a very striking face, the sort ladies admire, you know; eh, Miss Livy! —a bold eye, meaning conquest,—and a steady stare, and a good complexion."

Livy, who, with quick instinct, saw her father's look, replied,—

"Not *our* style, Mr. Lumley. Those sort of faces are odious, and neither handsome nor likeable."

"No," said the Beauty, pettishly; "that's the regular healthy ploughman sort of thing. Any country bumpkin, I am sure, could get *that* up."

Sometimes, but not often, Old Dick Lumley thus "put his foot in it."

"Well, you, the ladies, are the best judges of that. What can we know

about it, except exhibit our phyzes in competition? Let the best be taken. Can I say more? But I am too long over this story of mine; and so I come to the last day, when I was going away.

"The barrister man had told me, with a foolish confidence, that he had all but got her consent, and was in the greatest jubilation; but you know I am sharp enough in my way, and I had seen some-thing else going on, as it seemed to me, between my gallant colonel and the girl. As I said, I could not recal the story about him, or stories; but the ladies, I am bound to say, respected him highly. And why, ma'am? Some one had given out that he had been distinguished as a love-maker and heart-breaker, Miss Livy; and, 'pon my word, I don't know whether I ought to mention such a thing in this circle, but the rumour was, he

had taken to running off—with married ladies. And I assure you it amused me to see the curiosity and horrified interest there was about him among the ladies."

Beauty Talbot simpered and arranged his collar, as if *he* could quite understand that trait of human character.

Mr. Lumley himself noticed something like awakened attention even in the two ladies who were listening to him, and thus supported his unflattering description of a corner of our human nature.

Mrs. Talbot said,—

"I could see no attraction in such a man, and would shut my *doors* against him, as if he were a wild beast."

"Ah, yes; but we were in Ireland, where love, war, and hunting, they told me, was everything. But now I am really coming to the point. I pass over a good deal of what I saw, and what I

guessed was going on; but on one grey evening, my Lady Boreena asked me would I take a drive with her and her niece, in a private outside car that Strachey had? I was delighted to take charge of them, and we had a pleasant drive that really was most agreeable.—(I wish these things were more introduced with us.)—We were talking a good deal over the colonel and his doings, and I assure *you* my lady did not take precisely your view of that officer. But as we talked, I suddenly, by a sort of Providence, recollected all about him. He was Gore *v.* Gore and another, do you know. You see that makes all the difference; it being quite a serious thing then, as Lady Boreena said. I remember perfectly, no divorce could be got.

"We were turning back, afraid of being late for dinner, and putting the horse to

it, for we had a good seven miles to go, when we came close to the station: and at that moment a common outside car passed us, with two people on it. Now it was not very dark—only grey, you know; but I assure you I have the best eyes in the world, and I said, aloud,—

"'My God! why that's the Colonel and that——, the manufacturer-girl.'

"I forget her name; but so Lady Boreena always called her. She said to me,—

"'Oh, impossible!'

"'There could be no mistake,' I said; and these were my very words—'and it really has the look as if they were trying to catch the train.'

"I had stopped the car; the same idea was in both our minds.

"I think, Lady Boreena,' I said, it is almost a duty that we should see a little

more of this, as guests of our friend Strachey.'

"And so we turned back, I declare we did; and went towards the station.

"Now I really like getting on a track of this sort, for, you see, it makes an adventure. Things are generally a little tame, you see.

"So I got down, went into the station, and there what do you think I saw—or who do you think I saw standing on the platform? Why, my young lady. She started, but then looked at me wildly.

"'Not going away?' I said; 'and with that colonel? Most singular!' I said.

"'Why should you assume that?' she said, coldly.

"'Because it looks so strange,' I answered; 'the tableaux coming off to-night you were to take a part in, and—'

"'I am leaving that house,' she said,

'where I have been insulted, putting up with long insult from you all. I have met genteel people who have been kind to me.'

"'To be sure,' I said. 'But really you ought to reflect, our excellent friend, Strachey, and Lady Emma, such a *thing* taking place *from* their house, and all the talking, and your friend a *married man*—'

"She gave a cry. 'Married! no.' At that moment he came up, and heard the word. 'Now, what do *you* want?' he said, in a very rude way, I must confess. But he was a bad style of fellow.

"'Is this true?' she asked, turning to him.

"'My good sir, you can't. We about town know of "Gore and Gore." It's absurd. At this corner of Ireland, of course, it was very natural it should not have transpired.'

"'You have deceived me, then,' she

said, it is true; I see. But O! what was I near doing?'

"'Nothing,' I said. 'I have been taking a drive with Lady Boreena; why should you not have joined *us*, and why may we not have picked up the Colonel on the road, or better still, why could not he have gone away on duty or sick leave?'

"On that he broke out in very abusive language. But I always heard he was a low fellow, a man not to know exactly. So I took no notice. We took our gay lady up on the car, and jogged home most comfortably, talking of the weather. And, would you believe it? she was the coolest, best trained creature I ever met, and not in the least grateful to me; actually challenged us to tell it out if we dared—what if she *had* driven on a car with an officer? other young ladies had ridden out with gentlemen—that no one would believe it;

and actually appeared this very night in the charades, and brazened it out before the company. I never told anyone then or there—behaved with unnecessary honour. So did Lady Boreena; and she may thank me if she's respectably married to one of her own class, which no doubt she has schemed out by this time. For she was decidedly clever. Now there's a story you wouldn't meet in a novel!" The ladies were rising to go.

"A most curious history," said Mrs. Talbot, "and very dramatically told. But you never mentioned the name."

"Oh, come, that would not be fair, you know; honour."

Mr. Lumley was standing up, and holding the door open. Many gentlemen make this effort with an air as if it was the highest act of gallantry known.

"Oh, you must, really," said Mrs.

Talbot decidedly, and stopping short in the doorway.

Mr. Lumley looked at her from head to foot in deep admiration. Olivia was gazing fondly at her mother, and thinking how handsome in figure and brilliancy *she* was. The light played on her fine hair, complexion, and the graceful arch of her neck. Even Mr. Lumley wondered at the "preservation."

"Well," he said, shaking his head, good-humouredly, "someway the name *has* slipped out of my memory. I know so many people just merely met in that fashion. But it will come back to me."

"I shall expect you to tell me," she said, turning away.

Then the two gentlemen sat down, and "drew in" the chairs close to the fire, and Old Dick Lumley unpacked a little private and scandalous wallet of stories,

such as these old fellows carry about with them, and from the choiceness and rarity of what they offer, keep up their credit with the men, and old ladies not too nice. These related to conquests and "awkwardnesses," and what is described in a newspaper as, "a most painful occurrence in a family of distinction." In the middle of which Mr. Lumley suddenly called out, "Ah! I have the name! I knew it would come back. I never lose anything altogether. Well! Suppose we go upstairs."

Beauty Talbot felt that they were on a subject in which he was an expert, and would have liked to add some old experiences of his own, before he had gone into paddock, as it were, and of more innocent sort. He always grew melancholy as he thought of past glories, the brilliant days of his life, the choice annual, bound in silk, now closed fatally,

it would seem, for ever. He went upstairs a little depressed.

Mr. Lumley walked over briskly to Mrs. Talbot, who was in her most graceful sitting attitude, like the tinted Chalon rival. "I have got the name for you. Memory must obey your directions; there is no help for it. It *was* Hardman."

Mrs. Talbot half rose, from the start, a light was in her eye, "What! not *Rosa Hardman?*"

"I declare, yes, though. How did you know?"

"Why, they are neighbours of ours."

"My goodness, no;" said Mr. Lumley, in a little alarm. "Then I must ask you to be a little careful, it's so long ago, and things get magnified; and—really I am not sure."

But Mrs. Talbot was scarcely attending to him. She was in a reverie. When

later, Mr. Lumley was taken up to the snuggest of bed-chambers, she remained up by her own fireside, looking really brilliant, and like her picture.

CHAPTER VIII.

ROSA'S HOUSEHOLD.

It being now known that the little settlement was to lose the agreeable —th Regiment and its colonel, who were ordered off to Malta, there was much regret expressed. The local paper expressed the conventional eulogium of "both officers and men having endeared themselves to all by their courteous bearing, soldier-like steadiness," &c. The "men" were of the usual type, getting drunk about as often or as seldom as other regiments; occasionally using their belts in a public-house row, and making themselves as acceptable as they could to the maids and wives of the

place. Colonel Labouchere and his officers, however, deserved more commendation. They were really a "nice" set; gentlemanly, and with a simplicity and good nature which sits so attractively on a soldier. They had made many friends: had taxed their purses handsomely to return all civilities by many dinners and little entertainments. They were thus really regretted. Regiments, indeed, have quite as distinct dispositions as individuals; and in the service there are corps which are overbearing, empty-pated, and ungracious; extravagant, dissipated, and good-for-nothing; selfish, getting all they can and returning nothing; with not a few that are open-handed and amiable, and of the pattern of Colonel Labouchere's —th.

The commander himself often gives the tone. Sometimes he is a hardened old

campaigner—a modern Dalgetty—whose life in love, war, money, and everything has been one steady forage party, in which he has made everything turn to "provend." To hear him at the head of his mess-table, giving sound advice to his children,—cautioning them, instructing them how to get all they can, and smiling over anything that seems like "a do" of a civilian, is scarcely wholesome training. It is when he hears of some honest attachment in a young fellow that his fatal influence most prevails; and he grows brutal almost in his ridicule, and even threatens. "Leave her there," he says, "it's her own look out, a scheming lot they all are. I know 'em well. I wonder you can be such a d——d fool! Come, sir; I'll have no pauper marriages in my regiment. No women hoisted on the baggage-carts coming after us. Leave her! and serve her right."

The others, well trained by these excellent lectures, join in the contemptuous cry. The youth grows abashed, and the victim generally is left. "Bless your lucky stars in your prayers, if you say 'em, that I saved you, my boy, from that parson's daughter. She's gone off by this time with some attorney's clerk."

Of quite a different sort was Colonel Labouchere—a man more like an agreeable country gentleman than stern chief of a regiment. In unmarried men of his time of life and of his character, and in that service, there is a certain charm. Indeed, a certain famous and witty lady has said that no man ever could begin to be agreeable until forty-five years old. So have young ladies been heard to declare that they admire this class of man—something grave enough to look up to, and yet quite familiar enough to associate with and

love. The colonel's age was not so much as this; he was liked by all, though there were but faint hopes of his being secured in the honourable tie of marriage. It was understood that there had been some early disappointment, which had driven him from the plan of entering the church into the army, where he had, perhaps, hoped—so the young ladies arranged it—for an early death.

He had been foremost in encouragement of the hospitality of his corps, and stimulated those drawings on their modest resources which furnished forth—not coldly, by any means—their repeated luncheon tables and balls. His subscription was always the handsomest. The good people of the country, seeing him always with the Talbot family, arranged, as the manner of such is, that he had designs on Miss Livy. In such a society the presence

of motive is always insisted on for the most indifferent action—as well dance a valse without a partner, as do an act without a motive.

When news of this farewell entertainment was spread abroad there was sincere regret. At The Towers, Mrs. Hardman received the card, and brought it in to her husband in his gilt study, as it really might be called. There he affected a ministerial air of office: answering "my letters," receiving interviews with "my servants," and, very often, with the duke's coachman, who had become very exacting and exorbitant in his demands, and, on the slightest demur, would present his resignation, like a pistol, at the head of his employer. How that employer longed and prayed that he could have *genuine* work of the real something official, or *quasi* official, membership — the most

trifling office! But, then, a contest was fearful to think of; and, it being known that he had money, his very presence at any borough was a challenge. He was willing to give a certain sum, but actually hesitated at a thousand or so more; for meanness, avarice, and the foolish improvidence which will lose the thousand pounds already spent, rather than try and save it by two hundred more, all sat side by side in his miserable soul. He spent, and then grew unhappy and saved. His house was really only a theatre: at most times dark, cold, mean, shabby, and, on a few occasions, lit up with a false and tinsel splendour, and the public admitted.

Yet he was romantic in a certain sense, and lived in quite a world of dreams. He was always picturing himself as his portrait in the dining-room. He would sit hours

in his study, besides having nothing else to do, with his elbows on the arms of his chair and his fingers touching: seeing himself in his official room: "I regret, gentlemen," he would say to the deputation, "it will be out of my power to recommend Government to do anything for you in this matter. Irrigation is, no doubt, a great matter; and the state can never be indifferent to the claims of waste lands. But I should deceive you, and deceive myself, were I to hold out any hopes," &c. He had a hundred various attitudes of this sort; and would as it were, wake up wearied and disheartened. He had, however, an old mercantile pertinacity—an obtrusive offering of his good offices and services, which sometimes extracted, even for shame's sake, some return from those he so obliged. There was a certain "lord" whom he had met

at some board, who had a son in Parliament and some influence himself, and on whom he had quite fastened. His perseverance was long-continued, without result; but at last he contrived to be of some practical use, by a sort of "fluke," as it is called, and succeeded in laying Lord Bindley under a positive obligation.

On this very morning we are speaking of, a letter had come from that nobleman, asking him to Bindley, the first house of genuine condition he had succeeded in breaking into. He held counsel in his room: his hand under his waistcoat, as in the famous picture. The lord—his lord—would now do everything for him; would get *him* office—a seat, perhaps—anything. This was all he asked; one foot on the first round of the ladder—once *that* established, others should draw him up. With a really powerful mind such a

"first round" *is* the first step to success, and not the victory itself; but with minds of this gentleman's pattern it seems the *last* round of the ladder. Their stupid vision confounds means with the ends. And thus Mr. Hardman sat in his pompous throne of an arm-chair, looking at space with an official scorn, refusing places, and dismissing deputations. Everything would follow as a matter of course. Bindley was seriously embarrassed; he had a younger son, Reginald, the Honourable Reginald Bindley, who should marry *her*.

He sent for his daughter. It would be impossible to give an idea of his inflated reception of her. It was as one who should say, "What would you all be without *me*; I plan everything." Yet, on more ordinary occasions it was believed that he stood in awe of her. She had a

quiet and superior manner, in presence of which he was abashed.

"Well, papa?" she said.

"I have sent for you," he answered, "to tell you of a very important matter. I have received a letter from my friend Lord Bindley, asking us to his house —to stay —to stop with him for a week. I expected this, and I knew he would. There will, of course, be all sorts of influential people there."

"Well, I suppose you will go and stay the week. Is there anything else?"

"Of course, you can't understand these things; it can hardly be expected, as you have taken no trouble in bringing it about, either leading up to, or planning—"

"Leading up to a visit—planning it?" she repeated, as if in astonishment.

"Yes. All seems quite smooth, of course, to you. You only enjoy the

fruits. I have the labour. However, you and your mother will get ready to go."

"Of course," said she. "But I shall find no pleasure in such things; nor will you, papa. We shall be out of our sphere; these people will look down on us. No expenditure of money, no time or labour can ever triumph over that. I know it—see it in a thousand little things that escape you. With all that forcing our way and struggling, they are sure to turn at last, if we at all interfere with them; and a word or a look is enough to drive us down again. Ah! you know it is so, papa; for I have seen you suffer from it."

"Oh, I don't follow this at all; you are talking of what you cannot understand. You are a fool!"

"I have always said," she went on, as if talking to herself, "that it would be a far more honourable, and a far more suc-

cessful, way of getting on, to try and rise in our own sphere; to try and cope with our set, and compete with them. These lords don't suit us, and are of no use."

Mr. Hardman trembled with rage. "We shall go to Lord Bindley's on Monday next; so you will be ready. I did not send for you to hear *your* views, but to state mine. If you are a fool, I am not one."

"I could not go on Monday next," she said, quite calmly, her round eyes fixed on him passively, and without any defiance. "You know we have promised Colonel Labouchere for Wednesday."

"I don't care about that. Do you dare to oppose me in this way?" he said, rising up. "What is this coming to? What is the meaning of it?"

"I would not disoblige him for a thousand lords. He is going away the next

week, and he is giving it for us—for *me*."

"Yes; that is another thing," said her father, very red and excited, and walking about. "A fine person you are taking up. But don't begin thwarting me, I warn you. I have put up with that game long enough in my own house."

"I don't want to thwart you, papa. But I am determined not to expose ourselves to stupid insults."

"I don't want this at all. I don't choose to enter on it. If you like to take up with beggarly fellows of this sort you may; but you pack out of this, ma'am, and without a farthing; and we shall see what he will say *then*. Ah!" he saw her colouring, "I have you there, I think. That brings it to a focus."

"Yes; in the usual way," she repeated with scorn. "But I do not know what

Colonel Labouchere's views are. I have no idea of 'taking up,' as you call it, with anyone. But I am determined that we must not appear ungracious or unkind, or give them *cause* to say that people of our condition are as *vulgar* in mind as they think us in other directions."

"This settles it!" he said in a fury. "Things are coming to a nice pass, indeed. Then, I tell you, I mean to have my way. It was I who made my money and my house, and you would be a beggar but for me. You shall do as I bid you, or take your own way; and if I wish you to marry anyone—to Lord Bindley's son, the Hon. Reginald—you shall do it, or be a beggar."

She smiled. "The Honourable Reginald! When has he come on the scene? Where is he?"

"Nothing to you, or to anyone but

me. You shall go with me to Bindley, and no bones about it."

"Not until Thursday morning, papa. I am sorry to go against your wishes in so trifling a point, but you will be glad of it yourself later."

He was speechless now. He had not a strong will, no force in bearing down opposition. He had only bluster, which is a brush of feathers.

So the matter ended—as she knew it would, and, as he had an uneasy feeling all through, it must—in his giving way. His poor pride would not let him do so openly, so he was mean enough to invent the arrival of "a put off" from Lord Bindley "until Thursday or Friday morning, whichever was most convenient." This he affected to read out. He might have seen in his daughter's face, only he had not courage to look there, how well

she knew the untruth of this subterfuge. No wonder she was considered a "strange girl," or that "the duke's coachman" pronounced her an "etarnal jibber." No one understood the secret of her singular mind, or what thoughts and theories were working within her—how sensitive she was on the score of the very thing she affected to make little account of, namely, their rise and their having "made their money." Not but that she would have accepted and adorned a poorer position; but it was the mean, paltry strain, the really "vulgar" aping of what was above, which had attended their family all through—from the very earliest days of her childhood—that had worked into her very inmost soul.

This never-failing spectacle—this ogre, which never deserted them—was to her one of positive horror. It had embittered

everything. Figuratively, as it were, she had seen her father struggling, suffering, agonising, crawling on all-fours, to win "a shake-hands," or a "shake-finger" even, from a person only two rounds on the ladder above him. When he was the small partner, with a small house, he was crawling and agonising to be noticed by his gentleman neighbour. It took him a whole year of labour and meannesses to get this gentleman to dine with him—a person who would have been glad, on a week's acquaintance, to have a plain, honest man, who had made his own money, sitting at his table. The gentleman was disgusted with the mixed servility and arrogance of his host, and never dined with him, or had *him* to dine, again. When he grew wealthier, and had plate, there was the baronet, whom he worked as hard to gain, and almost failed as

egregiously in that case, except that the baronet had some object in view, and stomached "the offensive vulgarity of the fellow, thrusting his staring, silver Birmingham stuff on a gentleman in that way!"

In that household there were no soft pleasures, no tranquil currents of smooth life, drifting onwards; and the young girl, as she moved upward, lived as on a stage, with deception and trickeries all about her—meanness and bitterness and sourness (carefully concealed from the audience), hollowness, jealousies, and quarrelling. Had she started under other conditions, she would have been a warm, even romantic, girl, with prodigious sense, and even genius; and had her dull, low, boor of a father wit enough to learn something and forget a good deal, he would have found her a better auxiliary

than all his plate, and daubed gilding, and powdered servants. She might have led him gently and successfully on to those charming and select *parterres*, for the *entrée* to which he would almost have given one of his eyes. She would have done a thousand times more for him than his duke's coachman, and the wretched machinery which that figure represented. The vulgar pride of the "fellow," for such he was, prevented him seeing anything; and the truth was, he had a jealous suspicion of this power of hers, and he would have almost preferred to have remained as he was, than be indebted to her. From her childhood, then, at every turn, she was thus met; every honest impulse turned back, turned in upon herself, — just as a painstaking gardener would lop and clip a luxuriant shrub. Every hour almost of her life had

been marked by some such check. There was no kindly and genial cultivation; everything was dry, cold, hard, miserable, uninteresting. The only breaks were the victorious acquisition of "a shake-hands," or a call even, from some of the illustrious above; and the coarse jubilation, the arrogant exultation was as bad.

With surprisingly quick eyes she looked on, and like the blind, whose sense of touch is preternaturally sharpened, her vision, before which there was a cloud at home, became sharpened as she looked abroad; and it was like a revelation, as every moment she saw, or guessed at, the looks of contempt, of meaning, of amusement, as her father made his fruitless and contemptible efforts. And this feeling of being quite degraded produced in her a hostility, a bitter rage against the world, a wish to punish, to idemnify herself for

what she *felt was deserved*, yet what she resented. This was the secret of her character, of her manner, of a slow and ever-burning resentment, and what also made people say she was "a strange sort of girl;" and it is for this reason that so much time has been given to her description.

Therefore it was that to the family of "Beauty Talbot," and for the "Lady" of Beauty Talbot, she had a special repulsion. The clear eyes of the well-trained lady of fashion seemed to read off the whole story of their life, as from a well-printed book.

No one knew what agony this process was to her, no one could guess it. The quick eyes and quick ears saw and heard the revealed piece of vulgarity, the burst of "low" nature gushing forth, the grave face with the smile of amusement and

contempt, scarcely concealed, nay, even the sense of enjoyment in these escapades; all tortured the heart of the manufacturer's daughter. She grew at last to regard the other as a dreadful devilish enemy, because associated with such *refined* tortures. Nor was it surprising that the other lady, conscious of this power, should amuse herself by the exhibition, and find in the exercise of this Indian-like torture, an assertion of her superiority in those country districts, and reflection of old, old triumphs. The son had much of this sensitiveness rubbed off by mess, or military life. He was very little at home, and did not see much of the ways of his father.

Had the brother and sister joined forces, the rebellion would not, perhaps, have overpowered her state; but would certainly have led to a break-up of the

whole. For her father had no decency in his resentments, and, to carry some petty household point, would not scruple to exhibit his animosity before the whole public, and shamelessly "gird" at his daughter in a low, brutal way, with "gills" glowing, and fishy eyes flaming. Sooner than give in, on some wretched point, where his dignity—this with his child!—was concerned, he would have had a scandal—a turning out of doors. He did not know the refined art of hiding the wolf of a domestic quarrel under one's coat or cloak; nor could he, with smiles, allow the brute to gnaw his entrails out, sooner than reveal to others the discredit. This Spartan self-sacrifice is the highest the world can expect; and though in this matter of the ball he would have pushed affairs to extremity, the sacrifice of her visit altogether affected his selfishness too

nearly, and he consented to the compromise. This, then, was the atmosphere, malaria rather, of that household. With all their wealth they were poor, with all this struggling to rise, they remained low, with all their luxuries they had no enjoyment of comforts, though the minds of some of the household often possessed the idea that it was something like that conventional "Hell upon earth."

CHAPTER IX.

"AD MISERICORDIAM."

THE morning of this ball, which even for persons in the district who had long ceased to care for such entertainments, had an interest, from the very rarity, Old Dick Lumley went out for a walk, to keep himself in health and tone. He did not mind going by himself, as he could walk with an extraordinary and unnatural rapidity. This process he fancied kept that dreadful enemy of his, "Old Time" —the thought of a worse one he never let near him—effectually at a distance. People were amused to see his brisk, jerking figure rattling along at express speed.

Here he went by, quite blown with his exertion, in a young man's wide-awake, a light lounging suit, and his gaudy tie. He always said that "you can wear what would be considered staring vulgar colours, if you make it a habit, part of yourself, as it were." He, too, was looking forward to the ball. As he was returning home, very wheezy indeed after his exercise, he noted the great coach, gaudy and heavy, which seemed to quite fill up the little enclosure, and whose wheels had torn absolute trenches in the soft gravel. The great horses looked embarrassed, as if they had got into some little inconvenient cage or stall. The duke's coachman was on the box. Miss Hardman had come to pay a visit of state to Mrs. Talbot. She had been there about a quarter of an hour.

Mrs. Talbot had a grim look, quite

unlike the elegant vacuity of the Chalon picture, as she went in. She assumed she was going to battle. Yet she was surprised at being met with quite a deferential and submissive air. The look on Mrs. Talbot's face seemed to say, "What an extraordinary visitor! you have paid your formal visit already, and it has been duly returned; we honoured you by going to your dinner. You are not going to encroach now?" The accompaniment to this was an air of cold insolence in which, as mentioned, she was unrivalled. The other, for a moment, returned it, and seemed inclined to join battle—Mrs. Talbot, waiting for her to explain the object that had brought her there. In a cold way that showed that her heart was not in the subject, though she was trying to make herself agreeable, Rose Hardman spoke of the event of the

time, the military ball. "You, of course, are going?" she asked. "Colonel Labouchere told me so."

There was a proprietorship in her tone that Mrs. Talbot did not like.

"I suppose so," she said; "it seems to be an event of vast importance. It convulses the country far and near. So he is leaving? The old story, 'They love and they ride away!' From the little drummer, even, up to the field officer. What grief, what tears there will be!"

The other was listening abstractedly. "Our maid," she said, quite seriously and naturally, "*is* sighing after a faithless corporal lover."

"Then your father, who is so rich, would do a charitable act in buying his discharge, and setting them up. But it is always the poor people who do such acts of generosity, not your millionaires.

Though I should not blame him after that funny expedition he made here the other day. It was so goodnatured of him; but there was a simplicity about the proceeding that has amused us ever since. The great carriage and the picture carried out; we did not know what was coming next."

Rosa's eyes flashed. "Goodnature seems always ridiculous. It was meant well, I know." Then she seemed to put a restraint on herself.

"It was so droll," went on Mrs. Talbot in polite enjoyment. "I did not know what to make of it. It was very kind and all that; but I am surprised your father would not have known I could not have accepted such a present after a few hours' acquaintance."

"My father," said the girl calmly, "is a simple, rough man, and you know by honourable ways he has become what he

is. To raise himself as he has done requires virtues and gifts that are honourable, and rare, and must be respected. Now, what I would ask you, and what I have come to ask you for, is this. You have seen what is called fashionable life, and know all the refinements of ceremonial. They are, as far as I can see, merely on the surface; but be that as it may, I am sure you will not refuse me this."

It was strange the instinctive dislike Mrs. Talbot had to this girl. That cold superior gaze challenged her. She felt her lip curling, and something prompted her to exercise her tongue.

"What is coming?" she went on. "Good gracious! this solemnity is quite alarming. You are not going to ask me to accept a picture, are you?"

Rosa coloured; but again restrained herself.

"I say," she went on, "we are of the 'Newly rich class,' as the French say; and we have not had experience of many things, with which those more fortunate in their birth and education have been gifted. They may be advantages or not—I cannot tell. But there are redeeming things, and in this district, this little place, I would ask you to be forbearing and generous to my father and to our household. For these things are felt acutely, trifling as they are."

"Dear me!" said Mrs. Talbot, growing nettled at "being preached to" by the girl. "This is growing quite melodramatic! I really don't follow you, for of course you have learned, or at least your father has, that everyone in this world must take their chance, and not be *too* sensitive."

"It is for *him*, not for us! There can

be no pleasure in telling things about, and holding honest people up as ridiculous, and," she added, earnestly and significantly, "I could repay you in a way that you might like."

"Repay me!" repeated the lady of the house, haughtily; "repay *me*, Miss Hardman? I am at a loss to understand you. This is nearly as amusing as Mr. Hardman's picture."

Rosa looked at her with scorn. Suddenly was announced at the door, "Mr. Lumley!" and in fluttered and bustled that cheerful gentleman. As Rose Hardman turned pale and half rose, Mrs. Talbot looked with smiling triumph on the situation. She really had instinctive dislike to the girl. "Mr. Lumley, Miss Hardman," she said.

It was hard to surprise Old Dick Lumley, or, at least, make him *show*

surprise. He had great tact, too, and at once fell into a neutral tone which might express that he had known her well, or had just met her in a crowd. It was indifferent, and no one could decide. Dick Lumley was rattling on about his walk, and the fine air, and about all he saw, and the clergyman who asked him in "to have a glass of wine," and how the clergyman's wife was curiously connected with his dear old Lady Hubbard—"so we got on famously." The truth was, we might set Mr. Lumley down in any district of the kingdom, and he would be certain to "root out" some one connected with a "dear Lady Hubbard." This amazing charm is given to few, and is worth vast sums of money; while there are many who might be in the same hotel with their own father and mother, and not find it out. He was too adroit to recal their acquaint-

ance; but Mrs. Talbot did. "You told us, you know, you had met this lady in Ireland, I think."

"Yes; long ago, though," said Dick Lumley, bowing to Miss Hardman with a confidential air, that said, "Ah! Traitor! you are safe." "The quantities of young ladies I meet with is amazing. The mammas now bring them out in flocks, five at a time. Like old Lady Annible. It confuses a man, and it's not fair."

"Yes—you told us of Mr. Strachey's house in Ireland," she went on, pitilessly.

Dick Lumley was quite a match for her. In his walk he had seen The Towers, and respected it as an establishment. He had asked and learned a good deal about it also. The carriage and horses spoke for themselves. So did the Duke's coachman, with whom, had he chosen, he could have found out some mysterious

rapport. He was much provoked he had been betrayed into that foolish story. He would be more careful in future: though alas, during these months he was wagging on to eighty. "My dear Mrs. Talbot I was a devoted slave of a certain young lady at that time, and she certainly recals to me, Miss Hardman—a cousin?" he asked, in an insinuating way.

Rosa tossed her head; then rose to go. "I thought," said Mrs. Talbot, "Miss Hardman had come to offer me a picture which Mr. Hardman was good enough to surprise me with——"

Rosa, as she said "Good morning," gave her a look there was no mistranslating, which meant, "You shall repent this, you have made me humble myself in vain!" then swept out, and was borne away in her great carriage. Mr. Lumley said, gravely, "O come; I say, that wasn't

fair on me. A fine girl, too! I tell you it can't be the same, now that I think of it. You oblige me, my dear Mrs. Talbot, to find that out. But I tell you what, don't offend that girl, if you have not done so already—eh?"

"O!" said Mrs. Talbot, contemptuously rustling her dress, "these low creatures! Why, I could have them brushed off, as I could get my maid to brush the dust off my boots. I should like nothing better than to put the whole set down; it would be like my going-out days, when I put down so many!"

But Old Lumley was pettish. Any risk of annoyance, any possible loss of dinners, stopping in houses, &c., was so disagreeable, and as he thought, "chopped a bit out of his life." "Such a childish thing, going about repeating things, and to the very girl herself! Dragging me into such

a business; quite a want of taste and tact!" Thus Old Lumley afterwards grumbled to himself as he dressed for the ball. But with all the satisfaction of a little malice, he hinted to Mrs. Talbot. "That's a clever and dangerous woman, that, trader's daughter as she is. I'd be rather afraid of her, and if I was you I would give her the right hand of fellowship, or even, ha! ha! the tip of the little finger of toleration, ha! ha!"

"Nonsense," said Mrs. Talbot. "She only wants to be kept in her place. And I think I have given these people a lesson that will keep them in their place all the time they are in the parish," and Mrs. Talbot, smiling complacently at herself in the glass, and leaning on her arched wrist, felt not a little the flush of a triumph. She had the true training, after all; she looked and was a high-bred, handsome, elegant woman still.

CHAPTER X.

THE BALL.

THE officers were quartered in the little town, in an old institution—Poor-house, most likely—which had been converted, like some of their arms, after a new pattern, into barracks. Additional buildings had made it very comfortable and convenient. The centre building, now seen at a distance, about nine o'clock of this night, was lighted up cheerfully, and seemed to hold out a far-off and encouraging invitation to the rustics standing about, and to the guests presently to be expected. Such an entertainment is exciting, in its way, even for those outsiders

not privileged with admission. For them the cheaper entertainment of standing in a crowd at the door, about the awning which the clever "handy man" of the regiment had put up; for in every corps there are plenty of these skilful craftsmen, who are delighted to find such an opportunity. That excitement of seeing the ladies descend in their fairy-land dresses—lovely, brilliant, seraphic almost—in gold and tulle, and costly fabrics, is a treat for the poor girls who must walk this earth along rude and rough roads. For them the warm and glittering blaze of light within, into which are absorbed the seraphic figures, the brilliant and sometimes lovely faces, revelations of another world.

Now drove up, in a pushing, elbowing way—just as the owner himself might have strode through a crowd, looking round for the police, and saying "it

was unbearable" — the great coach of the Hardmans, the Duke's coachman, shrouded in his capes, driving. Out got the rich man, and walked in through the lane, as if the whole show was for him, and the audience his. He was buttoned up tightly in his thin, short, blue coat, and gave his orders to Miller in a loud tone, very different from the one in which he addressed that officer in private; but this concession was well charged for in the wages, and the coachman tolerated it as addressed to his office, not to him.

"And see here, Miller, be here at two, will you? And come up promptly when I call you!"

The mob listened with awe; but still, with the instinct of a mob, they saw the acting; the duke's coachman seemed almost a greater man.

Inside there was a blaze of splendour—a tent-like robing room and boudoir for the ladies, that seemed their own room almost, with laces, and muslins, and maids, and a true feminine air. In the passages the deft sergeant-major and privates with a turn for handicraft had done wonders in disposing flags and cannon, and grouping bayonets and swords into stars and other figures, an exercise in which they take infinite delight, "beating," as one remarked, "Sou' Kensington itself."

There was a soft rustle and flutter of silk and satin and muslin drawn gently over carpet, as the innumerable little processions, Captain Mamma, rank-and-file daughters, trailed into the ball room, where Colonel Labouchere, C.B., and his Majors and leading supporters were grouped as hosts. There was even

a bashfulness and a little shyness in these good-natured warriors as they went through the function, which was no discredit to them, and if they could be persuaded of it, would become them vastly on more important occasions. The room was handsomely decorated—mirrors, scarlet sofas, little effective pet alcoves, on which a world of pains had been expended, and which the fond contrivers secretly expected would be the admired feature of the night; but which, like so many other things upon which a world of pains has been expended, were quite overlooked—submerged, as it were, in the general effect.

Mrs. Talbot and her party had already arrived, and were standing close to the military hosts, watching the guests make their entry, an occupation not at all devoid of humour or entertainment. The uncon-

sciousness, the nervousness of some provincials, to whom the situation was new, was the kind of amusement that quite suited the former *belle*. Mrs. Talbot, in right of her old service and the station she claimed socially, seemed to be the only one favoured with this privilege; her eye-glass travelling up and down, not with an open stare—she was too well bred for that, but conveying, as it were, that her sight was "near," and that she was looking for expected friends, yet at the same time planting a little tiny barb of a suspicion in the breasts of the more awkward that they were ridiculous.

This is the true and refined art, which may seem to have all the worth of rudeness, and at the same time keeps within the reserved pleasure grounds of good breeding. On that night she looked very distinguished—the bloom of the old ele-

gance floated about her—the ungenerous old man seemed ashamed, and gave his scythe rest from its eternal clipping, and the kindly and laborious arts of the untiring Livy had their reward. Among that crowd of rude and crude dressers, these ill-mannered, ill-kept, ill-clothed, ill-carried wives and maids, she looked the woman of elegance, who had fought and bled under the best soldiers of fashion. Her blooming child, excited, bright-eyed, and filled with delight and enjoyment at all she saw, was not unworthy of such a leader; but she, of course, wanted her mother's training. Even Phœbe, the sister, by the joint labours of every woman in the household, had been turned out with real effect and splendour; but the effort had been prodigious. Beauty Talbot himself, shedding sweet clouds of perfume as he walked—he, indeed, always deluged

himself, and his bill to Messrs. Piesse was really like his wine merchant's, comprising "so many dozens" of various bouquet vintages—was drawing on gloves of a matchless fit, and which, so far as importation and "dozens" and choiceness, were also like another wine bill. But these little luxuries, relics of the old "Beauty" life, were allowed to him with delight. They were overjoyed at such tastes, costly as they were, it, perhaps, being understood that they were rather extravagant safety valves. He was now scanning the battle field, eagerly buttoning the said gloves, looking out for the censers, which were, of course, to swing.

Such pains, by the whole party, had not been thrown away. The Colonel was at the ladies' feet. In every speech of his they seemed to gather, that everything they admired had been done for them. At

that stage of the night, "for *her*," was unreasonable; that would come later, as things warmed up. There was a gentleness, a softness, an almost tenderness, in his manner, that promised the best. He left the reception of succeeding provincials to his Major and other deputies. Mrs. Talbot herself laid the first gun.

"My dear Colonel Labouchere, we are all in such tribulation; and your going away spoils all our enjoyment in this charming ball. As for poor Phœbe, our poor Phœbe, she was not coming at all!"

"Not coming!" said the Colonel. "I can tell you that would have been an offence I never could have forgiven. I should have gone on board uncomfortable, thinking I had done something dreadful."

"I assure you it is the case. She is leaving us, too, poor girl! She has enjoyed herself greatly, and I can tell you is

very sorry for Colonel Labouchere's departure, as we all are."

Mrs. Talbot was not one of those who lay on hints coarsely and streaky, like scene-painters; yet the process was not less effective.

"The poor girl goes back to a dreadful place, near to a country town, quite unsuited to her. This has all been a little glimpse of Elysium to her."

"I have been very happy here also," said the Colonel, absently. "I have knocked about the world a great deal, and visited all sorts of places, and have never met such kindness, or persons I so like. We soldiers sometimes speak in an odiously patronising way, as if the kingdom was nothing but quarters, and to be viewed in reference to barracks only. I am grateful, I assure you; and deeply pained to go away."

A fresh arrival—one that made Mrs. Talbot's lip curl and her refined head jerk back. Enters now the Hardman party. Mamma, all afire in crimson satin, "old Vesuvius," one of the young officers said, who was called on to take her into supper; the calm, serious daughter—in her eyes cold embers of thought, yet holding conversation with Mrs. Talbot, and answering that lady's impatient toss as who should say, "We are asked as well as *you*. A great ball room, surely, is like the open street."

The Colonel, coming forward within the scorching glare of the crimson, shook hands with the party, and was returning to Mrs. Talbot, when he was arrested by Mr. Hardman.

"Very well done, all this; uncommonly well, Colonel. I suppose you'll have 'em dancing here till all hours?"

The Colonel never made any secret of his "imperfect sympathy" for the manufacturer, and always maintained a most distantly polite address to him.

"We shall be very glad if it amuses them; and shall be delighted to see them until morning."

"O, that's all very well; but I must think of my horses. My coachman, Miller, I can tell you—I had him, you know, from the Duke ——."

"You told me, I think," said the Colonel, gravely, "before. Will you excuse me now?"

The son, young Dick, has come up straight to Livy, and has borne her off into the waves of the enchanting waltz. The father looks vulgarly impatient and buttons his coat. It was only a necessary civility, but still there was a member's daughter, with many other "desirable

investments for captalists," as some of the prospectuses he read, would say. The first quadrille is then to be formed, and the Colonel leads out the Honourable Mrs. Talbot. Beauty, now very happy, and after beating many a covert, lights on little adoring "leveret" in her form, and complacently leads her to the van.

The host finds a major to take Miss Phœbe, and tells him "to come into our set," which he does. The happy girl could literally bound on the boards, as she had seen her sex do at the opera. He was looking at her with such interest—an *affectionate* interest, it seemed to her—and he engaged her for the next dance. Lancers, was it? She looked round, and there was the cold face, the thoughtful eyes expanding a good deal, and no doubt putting a number of questions: "What is the meaning of this neglect? Why is

this? Why is the preference given to her?" But wait until those Lancers come round, then her cup would be full, and drink it she should—dregs and all.

This young lady had learned some speeches by heart, as if for a play, "coached" by her eager sister—speeches of an enticing sort. She had others in reserve, of a more direct and challenging kind. Finally, she had a couple in reserve, to which the ingenuity of no man deliberating on escape, could find an answer, save one. She had been duly prompted in these artful measures. When then the last "shuffle" of the Lancers should be done, and Colonel Labouchere had led her enchanting form to those ball-room-glades and bosquets made for dalliance, there he should find himself at the worst, in an agreeable *cul-de-sac*.

During the present performance, Mrs.

Talbot judiciously left the matter where it was. It would glide down the incline of itself. He still maintained that *entente* which springs up in a quadrille when friends are all in the one set, though indeed a snarling guest remarked upon it, who had no partner—

"So ridiculous; as if they were all doing something so wonderful!"

But this was a mere glowering, disappointed "outsider," who knew no one, and had found all the "girls" engaged many, many deep.

That quadrille was over at last. Then came the eager, headlong galop, in which, as a coarse warrior remarked, they "put their 'mounts' well at it, and didn't spare whip or spur." The fine band in the gallery, far aloft, where its braying and blasting was inoffensive, was literally inspiring. Round and round, up and down,

rustled, jogged, stumbled, staggered, crushed, raced, and flew even, the excited couples. Then came the smoother and more entrancing motion of the valse, the more winged movement, the floating on sweet waves of a sad and plaintive music. Then the wished for quadrille.

CHAPTER XI.

WAR TO THE KNIFE.

NEVER was there so attentive and gracious a host. He passed over no one, and was not absorbed in too obsequious attention to the leading persons of rank; or, to use the more intelligible regimental vernacular, "the swells." What delighted, however, the neighbours, was the utter shipwreck of any hopes that their low, purse-proud, stuck-up Hardmans might have entertained. Where were their dinners now?—their outlay in state, their note-writing, driving to the barracks, their persecutions, in short, of that *true gentleman*, the Colonel, connected

with one of the first families, and who showed his real breeding and tact by the perfect way in which he had foiled their schemes.

Here was the end now, and "the man," as a dowager remarked, "was walking off clean and clear." As for our poor Phœbe, she was a mere bird-of-passage, and her claims had not attracted much public notice, or her efforts were too puny to be seriously dangerous. The great Hardman family sat up together—a small battalion, a row of idols, but with no worshippers. Mrs. Hardman, still in conflagration, conspicuous from afar—her husband—his head tightened back, and face showing his favourite mixture of arrogance, discontent, and mortification.

"A most ill-managed thing; most improperly arranged; no attention, &c.," he was saying to his lady. An undeserved

slander upon their host, who had been strictly impartial. But to the former manufacturer, attention to him must be in exact proportion to neglect of others. The daughter sat placid, and, better trained than her family, showed no discontent—rather seemed utterly indifferent to the neglect. The rustics little knew her, or how Spartan she could be under public mortification. They watched her still more, as, at the end of "the Lancers," the Colonel passed by, the ecstatic Phœbe on his arm, transported with rapture at the coming proposal which, as she learned from certain "meaning words" of his, was now at hand.

As she passed by her sister, she stopped for an enthusiastic whisper, under pretext of a settling of her necklace, or something as important. Mrs. Talbot thought the words were "all right"—that happy

speech which, a thousand times used, has brought joy and comfort. Has Rosicrucian won? "All right!"—Have the jury found? "All right!"—What did the doctor say? "All right!"—Well, you were late; I knew you would be. "All right!"—Does he agree? "All right!" And finally—well, what did she say? "All right!" Happiest talisman in the language, and which the French have now borrowed from us.

Mrs. Talbot was approaching the flame. The fickle and stout lady bridled among her many laces. The old belle's eyes lighted as she saw her cold enemy sitting neglected.

The daughter regarded her, with what seemed to the other a look of mixed dislike and discomfiture. In the large round eyes there was uneasiness, and a direct challenge. Mrs. Talbot's reply was

a quiet look towards a far-off doorway, towards which the Colonel and his partner were hurrying. She began the contest again.

"You seem not to be enjoying the night," she said, with a smile.

That smile had lain by many years, a little dusty, among other fashionable properties. With it, and that simulated commiseration and sympathy, how many rivals had she pricked and stabbed.

"Most ill-managed thing as ever I saw," said Mr. Hardman. "No introductions—no looking after the people. Positively, but that I ordered my coachman for two o'clock—"

Said Mrs. Talbot, calmly, "Well, we were thinking they were so attentive—such charming hosts, and all that. You must have been unfortunate."

"My father," said his daughter, "does

not come often to balls, and expects an attention which may now perhaps be considered old-fashioned."

Mr. Hardman turned on her in his most arrogant way,—

"Old-fashioned! What are you *talking* about? Did you ever hear such speeches! There's Sir Thomas Rumbold! a man I could buy and sell ten times over, and to see the slavish toadying of him that has been going on the whole night is disgusting!"

"My dear Mr. Hardman," said Mrs. Talbot, as if she was paying him some sweet compliment, "this is one of the hard shifts of our present social arrangements. Rank and that sort of thing are somehow unfairly destined to have precedence."

This pierced even the horny skin of the monied man, about as thin as that of a rhinoceros.

"I see what you mean," he said; "but let me tell you that sort of thing is going by, and will go by, yet more."

Just at that moment she heard the cheery clatter of the friendly voice swinging away behind her, and "Old Dick Lumley" came up talking away as fast as he walked. He was never strange in a strange place, and had the art of either knowing people everywhere, or of appearing to know them. To mere observers of the surface, that is to average worldlings, this came to the same thing. Wherever he went, Dick Lumley took care he should fall upon his old legs. He made absent people do the work for him. It was his animated interview with Sir Thomas Rumbold that had so inflamed Mr. Hardman; yet the name of some friend, at least three hundred miles away, had performed the friendly offices of introduction.

"Well, we are all carrying it on hard and fast, not losing a moment. See how exhausted I am! By the by, just heard about poor old Lady Towler. Not left a sixpence after all her drudgery. But, my *dear* Mrs. Talbot, you must come off with me. There is a supper-room, or a tray of something, somewhere."

Now there was a flutter among the dowagers; much as at the Zoological Gardens, towards four o'clock, the wild animals grow excited if a keeper pass by with even a basket. Supper was indeed announced. Everyone was trooping in, and there was even seen what Old Dick Lumley called the "indelicate spectacle of droves of women hurrying in companionless." Colonel Labouchere was busy with his duties of host. He actually came for Mr. Hardman to take in Lady Rumbold, thereby overwhelming that gentleman

with an obsequious gratitude. It was when both were away on this errand that Miss Hardman turned to Mrs. Talbot, and said in her calm way, as though she was remarking "How cold it was"—

"All warning is thrown away on you."

But here was Colonel Labouchere back again, eager, hurried, with a gentleman in custody for Mrs. Hardman. He could hardly escape the streams of molten lava that flowed down the sides of that volcano. Then he turned to Mrs. Talbot.

"Now I am free," he said, "you must come into supper with me."

Then it was that she thought of answering the speech the manufacturer's daughter had made her.

"All warning! Really, now! Well, we shall see;" and she swept on.

The supper was in the best taste, and the messman had done it sumptuously.

To do honour to the occasion, he had exhausted himself in all the pictorial but uninviting emblems which his brethren delight in when they want to be more than equal to the occasion. Old Dick Lumley, whose old stomach had been kept working for some seventy-five years, protested loudly against these devices. "I hate," he said, "to see harps, and birds, and coats of arms sprawling over a fine Yorkshire ham. You cannot cut it with comfort." Mrs. Talbot merely went to look at the table.

"You see that wonderful old man? Old Dick Lumley they call him. Such energy, such unflagging spirit; it is really charming. I feel quite obliged to him; I quite love him for it. All the amusing stories, too, the curious histories he has ferreted out."

The Colonel was abstracted, and look-

ing over at the other side of the table.

"Yes," went on Mrs. Talbot, quickly; "and the oddest thing he gave us to-day at dinner; such a strange account of a particular friend of yours. Volunteered it, I assure you; for we have no interest in the people."

"What," said the Colonel, "about her? Was it bad, good, or indifferent?"

"Well, I am afraid I should have to call it something like one of the three; but really I am indifferent about the matter."

"But you have made me curious. No food for the gossips, I trust—no scandal?"

"About your Queen Elizabeth? Well, I am not accountable. I told you it was volunteered."

He looked at Mrs. Talbot with a curious intelligence. That lady became disturbed.

"Tell me, what do you think of Miss Hardman?" asked the Colonel, abruptly.

This was the opening Mrs. Talbot was longing for.

"You would not thank me," she said, "if I were to give you a candid opinion. I do not like her. You ask me, and I tell you the truth candidly. Another might smile, and insinuate all sorts of wicked accusations."

"No," he said, "I am sure it is all perfectly above board, as they say, with you; but simply for curiosity's sake, what do you think of her?"

"Well, then," said she, "first, what do I think of her relations? With *me*, the fruit is always to be known by its tree. *She* is not to blame for coming of a set whose gentility, delicacy, sympathy, and refinement, and every nice feeling have been hackled and torn to shreds by the carders of their factory. Look at the coarse father, the odious mother, and ask

yourself if any good could come out of that Nazareth?"

"Well," he answered, quietly, "I did put that very question to myself some months ago, and have tested the matter very carefully."

"Why on earth should you do that?" she said, with a surprise almost natural.

"Well," he answered, "when I first saw her, I think on the very first day we arrived here—and here we are at the very last night—there was something about her that seemed to challenge inquiry, and to be worth inquiring about. You know these sorts of faces and figures. We see them even in a crowd; the rest make a mere back-ground for her. I knew she had a history, a history that meant struggling straight upwards, struggling against something at home, something that would bear itself, home and all and everything,

to the surface. Of course, I had nothing to suggest this to me; but still you know how irresistible such an impression is."

There was something like amazement in Mrs. Talbot's face. She was surprised into actually staring at him; but these light vapours of expression drifted away to the right and to the left, and gave place to one of her ball-room masks.

"Shall I tell you?" she said, and she was very unlike the Chalon picture. "I have an irresistible impression also. You know I am a woman of the world, just as you are a soldier of the world, and I can pretty well see behind all this poetising about faces that challenge and struggle upwards, carrying their entire homes with them upon their fairy-like shoulders. I could tell you, Colonel Labouchere, what all this means, in what they call plain

English; and what is more," she added, her lips struggling between the tightness of spitefulness and an ordinary smile, "I could unfold for you some incidents in the process of that struggle upwards, which have been mysteriously revealed to me; for I see where you are hurrying to, and you may thank me for it later."

"Would not that be real charity and good nature of you?" he said, quite gravely. "In a friend, certainly."

"No. You do not thank a person," she said, "who puts out his hand to stop your going over a precipice. It is a mere instinct. But does it not look like a providence that a pleasant old gossip was sent here to us with his usual bag of stories on his back, and at our dinner-table should have pulled out this very one; the moment he heard the name he began —names, dates, everything exact. Mind

you ask me. There I stop, unless you wish me to go on."

There was great elation in Mrs. Talbot's eyes. She was playing her trumps one upon the other, in the hasty triumph of her success. It seemed like one of the old games, long, long ago.

He smiled. "You know there is always some sort of scandalous story about everyone that rises in life."

"Yes," she answered, quickly; and the absent, questioning face of Phœbe, who passed by them on the arm of a gorgeous partner, stirred her; "but not a *true* scandalous story. There is the difference."

"Well, *yours*—I mean Mr. Lumley's—may not be a true one."

She looked excited at the contradiction.

"You shall see and know that it is. I have gone too far, or you have made

me go too far, not to go on further. Surely no one could be justified in thinking so highly of a woman who by the tact and promptitude of some mere acquaintances was saved from the discredit of an elopement. That's plain speaking!"

She paused to see the effect of this astounding revelation, for she had now surely beaten both the opposite players. The rude old claymore of the manufacturer's daughter was no match after all for the small rapier of the elegant woman of fashion. She was a little ashamed of the means which she had used; rather coarser than the ones to which she was accustomed. The enemy had lost and Phœbe might win yet; and if there was a bold charge while the squares were in confusion, might win too before the morning came. The Colonel seemed taken aback.

"Ireland is a long way off," at length he said, slowly.

"Ireland?" she repeated.

"Stories that come across in the packets with the mails," he said, "get knocked about or distorted during the passage, and with old Lumley in charge——"

"Oh, I see. So it is notorious—and you, going about from garrison to garrison —if you wish to learn details, then, ask our old gossip, Lumley, and he will pour them out for you. Well, I had thought more highly of Colonel Labouchere."

"I could tell you all the details. I heard them long ago—Lady Boreena and all."

"Who from, pray?"

"From herself."

"From herself?" she repeated, slowly.

"Yes, from herself; and with the

greatest candour. She is a fine, open character, though with faults."

"Oh, I see. I *begin* to see now."

"Yes, I know what you are going to say. She tells me everything *now*. There is a wonderful confidence established between us, Mrs. Talbot. That wicked story did not affect me in the least. It has added to my high opinion of her."

"You are deliciously credulous. And that confidence was not provoked by the fear of its reaching you in some other way. It is nothing to me, of course; but as we *are* balancing evidence like a court——"

"I can satisfy the court on that also. She told me long ago: Mr. Lumley has been here only a day or two."

"It is no matter in the world," said Mrs. Talbot, now her old self again. "You must settle the matter between

yourself and the lady. I could not determine, I am sure. Now, shall we go back?"

They went back. The rueful Phœbe received them with a sort of distraught look; it seemed, at last, to have burst on her that all was over. A curious tempest was in Mrs. Talbot's breast: it was, as she felt, a ridiculous craze in *her;* for with a person of *that* sort—"raised from the very scum"—how on earth could her proceedings affect a lady of Mrs. Talbot's quality? But she was mortified; and perhaps this "low" soldier wished to mortify her.

So the ball went into the small hours dramatically. For some there, it was the usual enchanting thing; for certain votaries, for whom time glided on, alas! too exquisitely. It was all lights and flowers, and sweet faces, and waves of

music, and whirl-whirl! On this earth, and in those early days, before the novelty has worn away, there is nothing half so sweet in life—no, not a fiftieth part so delicious—as the progress of a ball: the dance after dance, the too exquisite and endless turning, the rings of soft light eddying round and round. This, indeed, is what approaches nearest to a dream for the young. They hear the chimes, not at midnight, but at three, four, five, and six, and a sweet and excited face wonders at the obtrusive daylight coming in so cold, and wonders that papa or mamma think of going home.

It was strange, the coming out on the steps, and seeing the streaks of daylight, the clustering of white-cloaked maids and matrons.

Beauty Talbot had had a pleasant night; his wife had been lax in her duty—so had

his daughter. The young girls were good-natured, and did not "snub" him.

Mrs. Talbot was moving to the door; the rich man's daughter going away also. The latter came up straight to her, and said in a low voice—

"That was a worthy act of yours; it now passes out of mere polite hostility. It was an unworthy *stab in the dark!*"

"Miss Hardman!" said the other with dignity.

"With all your animosity against me, I could not have believed a lady of your rank and birth capable of it." Her eyes were glowing, her cheek flushed; she seemed moved, for once, to anger. "I shall never forget it, even though it has failed so signally, as it deserved to do. I was reluctant to go, and, I own it, to accept Colonel Labouchere's generous proposals—"

"What!" faltered Mrs. Talbot, in spite of herself.

"His proposal of his hand. But this has determined me; for it has shown that you and your class can have no quarter, no heart or toleration for us. Now, I tell you, Mrs. Talbot, there shall be none for you. Here he comes now," she added, with a change of voice. "Good night! Everything will be very sudden; and I may never meet you again—but I warn you, should I do so——"

She took Colonel Labouchere's arm, and passed away.

Mrs. Talbot, first mortified, then hurt and angry, ended by being contemptuous.

"A low, intriguing girl. How she spoke according to her class! I should never have known them; and this is only what we expose ourselves to."

The party of four came home very

silent and even out of humour. The Beauty, because no one was inclined to talk and "rally" him on his successes; and old Dick Lumley, because he had been kept up late, had eaten something at supper, which he *now* knew would by-and-by disagree with him; and because he felt sore and broken. He looked very shattered, and "parting in pieces" in that ghastly daylight. Miss Phœbe's dis-comfiture spoke for itself; while in Mrs. Talbot there was rankling the sense of defeat in many ways. All these four were to remember that night well. But Mrs. Talbot, as she laid her refined head on the pillow, consoled herself—

"A low girl, whom I ought to have had nothing to do with!"

CHAPTER XII.

PROGRESS OF EVENTS.

MANY months went by, droning on. No regiment had come to fill the place of the ——th; but the neighbours had plenty to talk of—victualled, as it were, for six months with gossip in details of Miss Hardman's rather hurried marriage at the Towers. It was considered a wonderful thing for the man of money. A fresh proof of shrewdness combined with wealth. "A long-headed fellow, Hardman; sure to do!" though in truth, as we have seen, he had nothing to do with the matter. Mere outsiders supposed he had given her a great fortune, forty or fifty thousand

pounds. But here was more of his shrewdness. Why should he do so? it would be gratuitous surplusage, would it not? The tone he took was this:

"Colonel Labouchere, sir, you do my family an honour; and you have won the affections of my daugher. Now I tell you frankly, she did not consult me, neither did you. Observe, I find no fault; but I merely make the statement. I may have my own ideas as to the part a father should play in these matters; but that is neither here nor there. You are a gentleman and a soldier, and of good family."

"Yes, Mr. Hardman," said the Colonel, quietly. "Well?"

"Well, it comes to this; I always intended to give my daughter eight thousand pounds. Had I chosen for her, I tell you frankly, it should have been *eight times eight* thousand; but now you must only

wait till my death. I can't help it, Colonel Labouchere. That's my way now."

"Mr. Hardman, you mistake me; it is really nothing to me. I have not thought of fortune; if I had, I tell you frankly, I could have done far better, as it is called."

A pang went through Mr. Hardman's heart. He had made a blunder; he might have given little or nothing. However, having taken this tone, he kept it up—a little wounded, yet not angry; aggrieved from *duty* merely, but full of goodwill to the pair. One of these days, he meant that his son should really "do" splendidly; for him he should bring a girl of title—a real, genuine, good thing, and with money, too,—none of your beggarly, hungry, fine people, "who bring nothing with them but a few gowns." He should go into the market, and take care to choose the goods himself. "See here, sir," he

said to his son, "you must look to what you are about. You have had a noble allowance, sir, from me; every whim of yours gratified, provided you spend your money in cultivating really nice well-born friends, whom it is a credit to know. I tell you, sir, you don't exert yourself; you don't push and cultivate people, and I am not going to be wasting my substance gratifying your low tastes. Why, another fellow with your means would hold up his head, and know half the peerage. Damn it, sir, I won't go on with this sort of thing for any helpless log like you."

"I can't help it, father," said the son, "it's not in my way. I haven't the art of it, and it appears to me so degrading. I can see they don't *want* us. Surely *you* see that yourself, father; money alone will not get us on."

His father glared at him. "You have the low drop in you, sir; a cur's blood; and, sir, don't preach to me. I had to put up with enough from your sister, in her day."

"I tell you, father, I have tried it, and it only brings me a cold air of insolence, which is intolerable. Let me make my friends in my own way, and I promise they shall be nice ones, and I am sure more useful than any of these people."

"I won't listen to this stuff," said his father, swelling and growing red; "it must all come to a point! You shall go my way, or I shan't go yours; and you may starve on your way if you like. I'll find people who will be glad to do what I want."

This was but a repetition of a scene that had often occurred and really meant nothing serious. The father was one of

those foolish men who prodigally waste all their engines of attack on some trivial occasion. A son after his heart would have been one who followed his own snobbish gospel of "the duke's coachman," and who laid himself out to get on in life: *i.e.*, to try to know lords and ladies, or the sons of distinguished persons. Should such a lad have written home to him from school, "My great friend and chum is young Pollard. He is 'an honourable' and his father is a lord, and please I want ten pounds; *he* showed us ten which his father sent him," the sum would have been despatched by return of post, and with exceeding pride. Friends would have been stopped that day in the street, and the letter taken out pompously. "My son is at Bagley, under Dr. Webber. He makes very nice friends—young Pollard, son of Lord Pollard, who was lord in

waiting." Had that son proposed an arrangement with his father, ten pounds down for every acquaintance thus made, with "refreshers," he would have gladly agreed. Had he brought home young Pollard on a visit during vacation, thus indirectly bringing his lordship in *rapport* with himself, he would have gladly paid a very handsome sum. For that lord must have acknowledged that kind hospitality, sent messages, perhaps written, hoped that they would see Mr. Hardman at Pollardstown next month, when they were having a few friends, &c. But what could be done with the dullard, for whose education he was paying at Bagley, and who did propose one vacation to bring back a friend—a country clergyman's son!

It was the same when the young man was put into the army. He showed incurably low tastes. The regiment had been

chosen expressly, for it held Robert Hodder, the Duke of Bullington's third son, the Honourable Algernon Dalkey, Lord Blackrock's eldest son, "people about the queen," a beautiful rich ground, well worth the gardening; and yet the fellow did nothing. That "set" kept together, and would be glad, Mr. Hardman well knew, to take up a young man with such a back. How rejoiced, how proud he would have been to receive a letter, "I am bringing down Hodder, and Dalkey, and three or four of their friends, on Monday, so have everything of the best; but I want cash sadly, and you must 'stump down' [or 'book up,' whatever was the correct slang] handsomely." Why, a cheque for £500 would have been under payment for such a blessing. In many a reverie in his gaudy baronial study, he saw himself receiving these fine young

nobles, graciously permitting their freedoms and eccentricities, abasing himself before them, fooling them to the top of their, or rather *his*, bent. But such could be only a dream, though he clung to its realization for a long time.

With rage and disappointment he found what a hopeless dull career his son was pursuing, who was turning out an utter failure; he was steady and "low," never would do anything. Once he was overwhelmed with mortification on being introduced to one of the regiment, son to the "people about the queen," and who told him, "O, he keeps a good deal to himself, you know, no one is more respected by the men." More respected by the men! What a character! And my Lord Robert Hodder, and young Dalkey? (Mr. Hardman was one of that class who always say "My lord this") "O, they don't

speak. He set Dalkey down before the whole mess for telling some queer story." This was the way he was served—was treated! Was there ever so unhappy a father, with a son and daughter so hopeless, helpless, idiotic, purposeless, and "low" in their tastes.

However, here was the daughter established in life, and fairly. It was something; the Laboucheres had a good name, and there was a remote lord, a little behind, seen through some misty clouds of relationship. This, however, furnished him with some lofty illustrations, and "my son-in-law Labouchere" was often introduced. Longhampton was the family seat of the misty lord, whom he called the head of the family, and through some agency he procured a photograph of that seat, and, suited with a gorgeous golden frame, it stood on the drawing-room

table supported on an easel, and not failing to catch the eye of every guest. Whether it did or no, he was certain to give his short lecture in the panorama manner. "That is Longhampton, the seat of my son-in-law Labouchere's family. One of the English show places, you know. They were to have gone there for the honeymoon; but the regiment was ordered away."

He gave dinners, it would seem, for the very purpose of exhibiting this distant son-in-law, who really figured more conspicuously at such banquets than if he had been there in the flesh. But having gone up to London, and after labour almost Herculean, having got within range of that lord himself, either at club, or party, and having made "my son-in-law Labouchere" introduce him, he found himself congealed and frozen up by the

treatment he experienced. No men are so liable to this sort of painful ague, under the variable and capricious temperature of aristocratic treament: none are so servile and timorous in their approach, so faltering in their address, or so easily repulsed. There is something indeed that invites, "repulse us, and trample on us, do." The truth was, the lord was one of the most refined of his class, full of a haughty exclusiveness, and had bitterly resented this alliance between one of his connections and a "trader." The stare he gave, the resentful expression in his face, that "this was a liberty," seemed to burn into the very marrow of the sensitive Mr. Hardman. The faltering invitation on his lips carefully conned, died away. "Our little place in the country, if your lordship would so far honour it. Near Longhampton, of course—of which a little picture stands on

our drawing-room table—it will seem a hovel."

"Colonel Labouchere? I know very little of his movements. Did you wish to speak to me about him?"

"O dear no! my lord, except, that is, he is now my relation, my son-in-law, I may call him—I thought——"

The lord shrugged his shoulders and turned away. Mr. Hardman tried a forlorn hope. "If you were coming down our way, my lord, at any time, I do trust you might honour our little place."

"Out of the question, much obliged to you," said his lordship, in a tone that meant as plainly "low intrusive fellow," as words would sound it. Then turned his back on the other.

Mr. Hardman saw amused faces at this rebuff; saw also the lord plainly describing the matter to a small group afar off; he

had the too quick instinct of pushing sensitiveness. He was, besides, one of those *gauche* men, who, when snubbed, exhibit the marks of it like a beating, and knew not how to withdraw himself. From that hour he could not forgive his daughter this mortification. On a character of this sort there is some satisfaction in dwelling thus minutely; the stores are inexhaustible, the clods of meanness turning up are fresh, and ever new. Character thus exhibited in various shapes and turnings is, in fact, story.

In this humour he was in no mood to be indulgent to his son, or to the family where the son was now visiting very frequently. Many were the delightful mornings the latter spent over in Miss Livy's company, and in that of her mother; for the young man, whose instinct was quickened by love, saw what was the daily and nightly

filial task of that daughter, and that if he must slowly draw himself into any appreciation, it must be by sympathy with what she was so steadily working out. The little drama that was being acted so perseveringly, by one of the actors at least, with such never-flagging labour, was for him a subject of wonder and admiration.

Accustomed to the selfishness of "men" at mess, and of men in army life generally, that utter unselfishness, that never-wearying and wakeful purpose, that organised deception that never slept, absolutely confounded him. After that, he could only lend his own small service, and do his best to aid the two women in what was the reasonable scheme of the one, and the pious one of the other. The routed Phœbe had retreated to her own dominions, and with elasticity, which is

the happy consolation of all such Cossack cavalry, would presently be preparing an attack on some other outpost.

Thus it was that the Beauty found himself of a sudden treated with a deference and a graciousness rarely accorded to him by men. There was ordinarily a tendency to be "free," to banter him, or indulge in exaggerated praises of his gifts, and of his accomplishments, which always left him uneasy and doubtful of their genuineness. This feeling would make him turn away fretfully, with a "you are always going on with some folly or nonsense! I wish you'd have a little more sense!" Nor was Dick Hardman's attention, or rather manner, founded on much more than an unconscious sympathy with the purpose of her he so admired. He was not inclined, as his father had discovered, to pay court to

any one; but the spectacle was so praiseworthy and interesting, that he was drawn unconsciously to take an earnest part in the little play. Very soon the Beauty was speaking of him with complacent approbation, as though *he* had found out that he was "a very nice, well-bred, pleasant fellow." And this criticism of good breeding and agreeability seemed based on the attention with which "He gave one smile," that plaintive ballad, was listened to and applauded.

There was a new lyric "on the stocks," not yet "got into shape," but which he was "composing," *i.e.*, sitting at the piano, his face turned to the ceiling, while his delicate lady's fingers, whitened carefully by art, spelled out a little accompaniment. The new effusion was to be "about one of the best things I have ever done; and I tell you what, I'll sing it the

next time we go to your house." To this new friend he imparted snatches of his old life, when he was going out among the countesses and young ladies. "I don't want to brag, Hardman," he said; "but with all the boasting of these men about me, I needn't be shy. If I were to show you letters that were written to me by certain ladies, with all the love, flattering things, and so forth, you *would* stare. These fellows, now, if a woman looks at them over her fan, or says a bit of nonsense, make such a fuss. Now I'm a married man, of course, and have done with all that. Though there are married men enough about us going in for foolish flirtation, quite forgetting that women don't one quarter mean all the folly they say. Bless you, I know pretty well what that sort of thing means, and what it is worth. I have had half-a-dozen of 'em

sitting round me at a time, saying things that would make a man blush; of course, it was all their fun. I took it at its worth. Not but that they really liked me. You know, I suppose, what they used to call me?"

Dick smiled. "Some of the donkeys thought themselves very funny in making a joke of it, and all that, in their low way. But I tell you the truth, I think it was much more of a compliment, and one that would never be paid to them, if they lived for a hundred years. I'd like to see Bolton, or long Napier, or Singleton pick up such a name. Not one of them, sir. It would be a different sort of name they would have got. You know I understood the world pretty well, and all that sort of thing: I served my apprenticeship under more advantages than most men; and because I live down here, in this out-

of-the-way place, because it suits me to do so, as a married man with a young child growing up," here young Hardman winced a little, "you don't suppose I have grown rusty, or out of date, or couldn't hold my own with the best of them, if I chose? God bless me, yes!"

In this sort of monologue the Beauty ran on. He delighted in this viewing of himself in the past, as a lovely and engaging figure; but it was under the reserve that it was a past he had quite finished with. So young Hardman took care to impress on him, thinking of the two women.

"O yes," he said, "once a man is married, of course these sort of attentions can have no interest for *him*. He would not care for them, in fact.

"O, plenty would care for them, and a

few would get them, too, if they wanted them, I assure you."

"O, but not the nice, refined, considerate husband, who has good sense. Why should he?" said young Hardman, rather anxiously. "If I were married, I should consider myself finished for ever and aye, with all that. I should be entering on a new life. And you, with so charming a person as Mrs. Talbot, a famous belle, that was more admired, as they told me—"

The Beauty smiled complacently. "Yes, she was at the top of them all, no one was so run after; but *I* cut them all out. It was a good deal talked of at the time, I can tell you; made a stir;" and thus the Beauty got back into his dreams again, looking fondly and sweetly to those old days of triumph—not, it must be owned, thinking of her, but of his

own *prestige*, in carrying off that rather Waning *Belle*, after no very warm competition. His own exquisite complacency thus helped the good work of that untiring lady and her daughter, and prevented him seeing the true state of things. It was happy, therefore, for all. It had gone on now so long, he had become quite accustomed to his lot, contented and "resigned," as some of his old sneering friends would say, or much as some one sentenced for "long terms" would gradually grow accustomed to prison life.

Mrs. Talbot did not relish these visits of the young man. She had still the same morbid feeling towards that house, and which seemed even to increase by dwelling on. Her retrospect took the shape of triumph, and she soothed herself by the notion of even a victory. "I drove her from the place. I drove her from the

place!" she said very often; and by that curious process well known to us, by dwelling on it frequently, and on its details, she became gradually all but convinced of this little delusion. And though her sweet daughter would not descend, even for the sacred purpose of her life, to any deceit, still, she too, from sheer sympathy, worked herself into a tranquil belief that the superior power of her mother, and the old charm, had become intolerable, unendurable, to that cold and free-tongued woman, and that she fairly turned and fled. In her favourite fashionable portrait attitude Mrs. Talbot sat, her still beautiful hand under her chin, in a delightful reverie, and thus soothing herself with the thought that the old charm was still left, and would be left. Still, though she thus disliked the whole family, "root and branch," her instinct showed her that

this young man was on her side of their party in the house. The same instinct told her that he was deeply in love with her daughter, and of this she warned her.

Livy laughed. "The idea, mamma! Love! why he is only a friend—just comes over here to amuse himself, and me."

"Well, that *is*, or used to be, love," said her mother. "But to marry into that dreadful family, that terrible man and woman always before you! my poor child, why you would die of it. Though, indeed, the worst is gone—we defeated *her*."

"I could not leave you, dearest," said her daughter, kissing her fondly. "No, never! No, nor dear Beauty. What would become of me without you both? Dick is very nice and good, and I have seen no one like him as yet. But the other is a different thing. We three are

so happy together, I could not endure thinking of a change. No, sweet, sweet mamma; that must never be!"

The graceful arms of the fine lady so admired in the portrait wound softly about her.

"What do you live for, darling? What is a girl's aim of life? No, dear; these are foolish notions. In time we shall think of what is suitable for you. *I* shall manage that, as I have managed so much. I wonder, dear"—and here she closed her eyes and smiled.—"if I were to go out of this weary world, would—your father marry again?"

The gentle girl's eyes lit, then she hid her colouring cheeks in her mother's neck.

"Don't speak so, dear; you must not. Such a thought! Our poor Beauty! he is so happy and good, and so content. There he is!"

And there floated up to them from below the sounds of the piano, and the sweet voice of the Beauty, who was "composing" one of his "little things."

"And how good he has been all this time—no running up to town by himself; no clubs even. It is wonderful, dearest, when we think of it."

Mrs. Talbot sighed a little wearily.

"Yes, but it has been weary work: so long, and never ceasing. It has been hard labour. But we may rest now, I think, my pet."

"Rest, dear. Poor Beauty! if he had been only left to himself all this time, you would have had no trouble. There are such unkind people. But he is so happy now."

The mother looked at her fondly, smoothing her hair languidly.

"Yes, I think we may think of you

now, dear. I must turn my thoughts to you. No, we could not send you into that lion's den—that low, coarse, manufacturing mother-in-law would make you pine away. You would die, dear, in that vulgar Brummagem prison. Ah! what would you say to my Cousin Robert, who is coming on Monday—a rising man, as they call it, certain to be an under-secretary, shrewd and careful? I know I could make him do a good deal. He was in love with me when he was a boy and I a young lady."

"No! no! no! mamma," she repeated. "You, I, and Beauty! we were made for each other. Let Lord Robert be under-secretary, or what he likes."

"We must ask these vulgar people, for we are in debt to them; and must pay, or they will sue us before the parish. It will amuse us, though. I know he will

be grovelling before Robert. I wish some one else was coming, though; a little battle and victory is so exciting."

"She has had enough dearest; and will keep the seas between her and you, if she can."

Now the voice of the Beauty was heard in peevish tones, demanding some one to aid him at the piano, and some one also to stimulate him with applause, and say, "How original! How pretty!"

He affected on these occasions to hear the effect of what he had "composed," as it were, for the first time, and to be pleased or displeased. He would remodel, or let it stand. So Mrs. Talbot herself went down—her toilette being correct, gauzy and floating—to undertake the office, and was kept for an hour and more receiving directions and corrections in her performance of the amateur and illegal harmonies

which he had written, being herself made responsible for their defects. He was not very well pleased with the result; she was not as enthusiastic as she ought to have been, and he was out of humour. However, the reserve came up in the shape of his daughter, whose warm and genuine praises restored the day.

CHAPTER XIII.

"MR. AND MRS. TALBOT REQUEST THE HONOR."

WHEN a delicate little note, with a delicate and refined monogram—the Hardmans had a monogram all ablaze with the lettering of a City shop-board, gold and colours, and a perfect *tangle* of gorgeous characters—was brought to the owner of "The Towers," he read it with great complacency. "Very proper! Very suitable!" He was pleased because he saw, from the formal character of the invitation, it was to be none of the dull, domestic affairs which they professed to like, *sans cérémonie*, and to consider far more pleasant than the great, dull, state dinners.

This was a very poor, low view to take; and, for aristocratic people, a most singular one. A state dinner, twenty-four or eighteen strong, was to him the perfection of elegance, civilization, and refinement. There true happiness and enjoyment was to be found, if you had been "given" some well-born person to take down. He had been afraid that the return compliment would have taken the shape of one of the foolish solemnities which he so dreaded; but he knew now they were certain of a choice culling of two or three flowers of rank, which was what the Talbots affected when they wished to be in state. There was more opportunity here, and he delightedly sent an acceptance, on the monogramed paper, which seemed like a bad imitation of some old MS. illumination, and which he sometimes boasted cost him sixpence a sheet.

The great coach of state had set them down—Mr. and Mrs. Hardman and their son—and they had entered in the usual single file. Mr. Hardman coming last, a little uneasy and hot, into that refined atmosphere, where all was elegant and subdued beside the hot glare of his own decoration, saw that there was a grey, large-headed gentleman with his wife, a young man with a beard, who was at home, and Old Dick Lumley over again.

He felt assured that these were "somebodies," though the society was scarcely of sufficiently flattering dimensions to suit him. He and his party seemed, indeed, both to themselves and every one else, utterly out of place. They were out of keeping and did not match. The resplendent Joss, the huge mass of human flesh, stuck over with gold and diamonds,

and set upon cushions, was the worst. Mr. Hardman—keeping back—hung uneasily on the outskirts. He wondered at the vast quantity the others had to say. How little they minded *him!* The round-headed gentleman proved to be Mr. Rawlinson, one of the Foreign Office secretaries, an important person, who knew every particular most valuable to know. The other was the Lord Robert, Mrs. Talbot's relation, a good-looking, bearded fellow, who was credited with an amount of wisdom vastly beyond his years, and, it must be said, still more vastly beyond what he really possessed, but which he utilized and put out to interest in a manner that was the envy of many. He had that admirable gift, which is the pride and despair of stupid people, of appearing to be full of things to tell, or to comment on, and which from such a person acquires

an extra value and importance. He was not afraid of his own voice.

Mr. Hardman hovered uneasily on the outskirts, smiling as if he understood, his hands behind him. Even when Old Dick Lumley and the Foreign Office secretary and Mrs. Talbot were all in a tumult of talk and excitement, laughing, clattering, interrupting, he was still outside the enclosure, and every one knew that he was. He knew that they knew this. Mrs. Talbot directed her husband to introduce him, compassionating his situation, and he was relieved at finding himself bowing humbly to a Lord Robert —something that he could not catch. Henceforth through the night it was, "You were saying, Lord Robert"—"As Lord Robert remarked"—"*Your* view, Lord Robert;" .and that young man, strange to say, known to be full of what

is called "chaff," was strangely deferential to him. But Bob was known to be "deuced long-headed"—"never to let go a chance"—and a few whispers from his relation that this was a shrewd, vulgar, clever man of business, who had made himself, and could help a man, may be supposed to have much to do with it.

The little dinner was delightful. The sauce about that round table was a never-flagging vivacity and good spirits, worth all the dishes in Francatelli. Old Dick Lumley, at such banquets, drank out of his first glass some of the precious fountain of youth—just enough, at least, to carry him through the dinner. How his ancient jaws moved in both directions; how the stories and commentaries poured out, and the choice wines poured in! The ruined teeth played on their restored fellows underneath, and the wonderful

vital strength which was within that old man of society gave light to his eyes, colour to his cheeks, inflexion to his voice, gesture to his arms. Mr. Rawlinson, without revealing secrets, gave curious little details of his office, which showed that he was intimate with ministers,—little points that could not be found in the newspapers.

"Lord Manley came down himself four times during the day to see that the despatches were ready. I never saw a man so nervous. Of course I knew what the office could do, and guaranteed him that all would be in time; but I give you my honour, at eight o'clock, just as other people were going to their dinner, down he drove again in his brougham. Most remarkable man, that. Must see everything done himself."

He had no such devoted listener as Mr.

Hardman, who bent his thin chest across the table to catch every word. It was impossible to ignore such a listener; and when Mr. Hardman repeated that it was wonderful, astounding — "What, in his own brougham?" — that he had never heard anything to approach it in all his life, the narrator was naturally impressed. Old Dick Lumley capped it with another trait.

"Just like him. He came in the other morning to one of Milkton Monsey's breakfasts, and made such a fuss about his egg being boiled properly; I never knew anything like it. It was too hard, too soft, a shade less, a shade more: and this man with a portfolio! Very curious!"

"Lord bless you," said the Lord Robert, impetuously, and putting them all down together, "there's nothing in that. That's part of the game. One of

the best actors going. I know it as a fact that *he hates eggs.*"

Mr. Hardman was outside the whole—kept away by a scrub fence and wall, over which he could only smile adhesion. He knew nothing of Manley, nor of the crowd of people who were made to pass across that dinner-table. Even when some one or something that he did know turned up, he could not get in any contribution. He was like a log on the neck of the party; that dead weight of the two seemed to press on all, and eyes of distrust were bent on them. Mr. Hardman was very uncomfortable; Mrs. Hardman found a refuge in steady eating. At last a soldier's name was mentioned, who was in a regiment out at Gibraltar. Here was a conversational hen-coop flung to him, and the Beauty put in for him.

"Oh, you ought to know something

about that. Isn't that Labouchere's regiment?"

"Yes, my son-in-law," answered the other, with an indescribable pomposity, which he did his best to avoid. "He commands it—commands the regiment."

"Very good fellow, Labouchere," the young Lord Robert said, in a patronising way. "Keeps his men rather stiff, but a good officer."

"You know him, then, Lord Robert?" Mr. Hardman said, with delight and importance mixed.

"Know him! To be sure—all my life. He has his faults, as every man has; but there is a tone of chivalry about him—old fashion, plenty would call it—which I like. That's a thing you can't get in the shops now. So he is married?"

"Yes, Lord Robert. He holds quite a distinguished position out there, such as

we have no idea of here. The governor can do nothing without him."

The young man laughed boisterously.

"What, old Fazakerly? *He* never *could* do anything without somebody. Ha, ha! Yes, Labouchere would shine out there. And near old Lady Fazakerly, Mrs. Labouchere—whom I've not had the honour of knowing as yet—would shine without much exertion. Poor old Tow-Row Faz! She was high comedy, or rather farce."

The Beauty struck in complacently,

"Oh, Mrs. Labouchere, I can tell you, will come out brilliantly wherever she is. She will have quite a court of her own there. In fact, certain to be queen wherever she is."

At this praise, uneasiness came in the faces of the company, so marked, that the gay young man looked at them with a little surprise.

But the Beauty, who was in high satisfaction with himself, went on to Mr. Hardman,—

"Yes, she will be greatly admired, you know; for she has a style about her you don't see in most women."

Again fresh pain in the two faces; Mrs. Talbot talking away rather nervously to Old Dick Lumley.

"Sir," says Mr. Hardman, as if he was returning thanks at a public dinner, "I am sure Mrs. Labouchere, if she knew of your kind opinion, would feel it very much. Yes, she has a great deal of cleverness, and tact above all things, with a surprising knowledge of the world. You know *that*, Mrs. Talbot."

Mrs. Talbot's lip curled.

"I believe Mrs. Labouchere to be clever —very clever, from the slight acquaintance I had with her; but tact is so rare

a virtue, and I am sure she has so many others—"

"To be sure," the young man said; "you are right there. Not one man in fifty has tact; and, certainly, not one woman in two hundred."

Mr. Hardman at once gave up his daughter.

"Yes, Lord Robert, there is a great deal of truth in what you say." In a lower voice he went on, to Mrs. Talbot, "She is peculiar in some things, my daughter Rose. She takes things into her head, and at times was quite too fond of her own way. Really I was quite sorry to hear, Mrs. Talbot, that one evening, at our house, she had been rather—you know—to you, and—"

"Rather I know, to me!" repeated Mrs. Talbot. "What sort of behaviour was that, pray?"

"I mean" (growing red), "that she said some things—if I had been there, I assure you—"

Mrs. Talbot drew herself up.

"I must assure you that you are under some delusion. In the houses that I have been in the habit of going to, no one speaks to me in the way you describe. I scarcely know Mrs. Labouchere."

"No, no; I don't mean that," he said in great alarm. "But she is hasty, you know; and I have great difficulty myself at home—"

"Possibly. I never enter into the domestic life; it would be far too complicated a matter. I must beg you will not be under that strange impression any longer."

"Dear me, no, Mrs. Talbot. I really never dreamt of it a moment."

Then the pleasant medley of general

talk set in briskly. Dick Lumley had a choice morsel or so of something which it would be ungenerous to call scandal, and still of so curious and delicate a flavour that a child might almost taste of it. Cooked in this way, and by a *cordon bleu* who knows his work, nothing is so interesting; and we can see even the professional *devote ex officio*, the serious one, raising her demure eyes with interest. Old Dick Lumley was an artist at this work, and the sauce in which he served such morsels was a kind of deep *sympathy*, conveying that it was with deep pain that he entered on the matter at all.

"Such a sad business, that! Baker, who used to dine there twice a week, told me that the poor, gentle husband used to force money on him. When he came home from the club it was like that mountebank in the play, *Belphegor*—wife's

lace shawl on the chair. Five children left behind, I'm told. Shocking! What is to become of the poor things?"

"Two, I heard," said Lord Robert.

"Yes. Rest were at school. I have it all from Baker."

Even our Livy listened to this story with "tearful sympathy."

After dinner Mr. Hardman came more to the front, helped by the young Lord Robert, who now asked about Bidgood, the financial gentleman.

"I suspect you know him, Mr. Hardman, through and through? I am sure you do."

Instantly Mr. Hardman became, as it were, seated in his study chair, his hand rested under his waistcoat, and he sipped his claret with importance.

"You could not have come to anyone who knows more about Bidgood. I have

known him since he began, when he sat at a desk, great man as he is now."

"More power to him, as the Irish say," said Old Dick Lumley, cheerfully.

"See here, Lord Robert, I may know this thing and that, or I may not. A man in my position, and with my opportunities, is bound to be careful in what he says. We must be guarded; you understand. But I can put it this way. If I had ten thousand pounds to invest in a strictly sound though not showy security, Bidgood is not the man I would go to, or even consult."

"Neither would Bidgood be the man to whom you would write, enclosing cheque to that amount, leaving it to his discretion?" said the young man, with a loud laugh.

"Uncommonly good — O, very good. You put it, Lord Robert, far more

forcibly than I should dream of doing. Yes. I must own, as to the cheque, I think I should prefer my own broker."

When the gentlemen came up, Lord Robert and Mr. Hardman were seen, in a corner close to the door, busy in council. The latter, in a flush of intimacy, was, with slow gesticulation, impressing some information on his companion—warning, hinting, something with excessive knowingness; the other, listening with coyness, and yet with wariness. Mr. Hardman was, no doubt, "putting him up to a thing or two" in his own department, with many a familiar—

"Now, my dear Lord Robert! See here, Lord Robert; just take a hint from me. Don't trust Bidgood an inch farther than you can see—not an inch!"

Mrs. Talbot sat back in the empress-like attitude of her picture, and with

much scorn was talking to Old Dick Lumley, standing before her in a young man's attitude, of one of the few subjects that could rouse her into excitement. "You saw her," she was saying, and she spoke to Old Dick Lumley as confidentially as she might to a favourite maid; "and what she was; a forward, self-sufficient person in the worst style and manner — with that hard tone of mind which women of her class take for well-bred repose. Her style, she must have picked up from the accountants in her father's offices — a sort of pertness and flippancy. She was good enough to honour me with a sort of challenge, in her own house, which I reluctantly accepted, and gave her a setting down, which I believe she will remember. I saw some time ago that she was a drawback to our

neighbourhood, and that she must leave it, and—she has left it."

"A fine girl, though," said Mr. Lumley, "and, I should say, would suit Labouchere well."

"Suit him well!" she repeated, with infinite scorn. "Don't you know that he is a gentleman! I confess I enjoyed it all. It brought back my old days, when I could use my *pattes de velours*."

"I think," said Old Dick, with a knowing look, "she was even trying to keep her hand in with our friend, the Beauty. I give you my honour, I heard her praising his singing, fixing her big eyes on him in a searching way."

Mrs. Talbot changed her position with a noisy start. "It is really amusing," she said; "but I have no doubt you are right. I should not have been surprised, she would have ventured on something of

the kind; just her vulgar conception of something that might annoy. It was not worth rousing oneself; but I did so, and she has taken a lesson with her to the colonies which she did not much like, and will not soon forget."

"Hallo, what's this?" said Old Dick Lumley, growing a little fatigued with this talk, which had little interest for him. "See, is not that like our friend? You remember the doctor in the novel who paid a man to call him out of church?"

A servant had come in and handed Mr. Hardman a telegram. That gentleman made it into a sort of ministerial dispatch, as though it came from some cabinet, at the same time surveying it leisurely, taking his gold glasses out, as though these irregular communications were ordinary enough in his case. But before he had read a line or two he gave a

genuine start, with a "God bless me!" which drew the attention of all in the little room. "Very awkward! very sudden!" he murmured; then putting the paper into his new friend's hand, left the room. The eager Dick Lumley was looking over his shoulder in a moment, and reading the following:—

"*Gibraltar.*

"Colonel Labouchere died this morning, suddenly. Mrs. Labouchere sails by the next packet. I will do all that is necessary. If you have any directions, telegraph at once."

It was from the major of the regiment, the fortunate officer who now succeeded "without purchase." Dick Lumley, with great presence of mind, said aloud, "O ah! a business thing!" not from any compassion for the wife; but simply in homage to the decencies of the little

party, and the fuss and discomfort it would cause him personally. Mrs. Talbot alone was disquieted, and it was with something like malice, but of which he was unconscious, that he told her. "It seems that poor Labouchere is dead, and the widow coming over by the next packet."

"Coming over!" she repeated, starting up. "Coming back here!"

Mr. Hardman re-entered; he had been himself to see about the duke's coachman, and also the messenger. He returned with a mysterious importance. He was, at all events, now the centre figure. Telegrams, dispatches, brought in, always impart a factitious dignity, or, at least, an air of fuss. He bade his wife come away, wrung Lord Robert by the hand affectionately. "I shall not forget," he said, "depend on me, and if you want

advice on any point, command me. This blow will interfere for a time, and, indeed, I was hoping we would have had you over few days at 'The Towers.' But by-and-by, by-and-by!" Mr. Hardman threw a plaintiveness in his voice, as though he were now crushed, and the wind *might* be tempered to such a shorn lamb as he was. Then they drove away.

The party remained laughing and chatting, and Old Lumley quite excelled in his cheerful touchings and recollections of the pompously bereaved gentleman. Lord Robert was specially merry on "my son-in-law Labouchere," and with a social disloyalty which is not at all uncommon, presented a series of comic etchings of the absent guest, more creditable to his memory than to his gratitude. This, indeed, is always the most tempting and irresistible season for another renewed party; the

sense of relief from stiffness, with a joyous *laissez faire* sets in, and a guest with some gifts must be of more than early Christian asceticism who can resist such a tempting opportunity. Every one stretches his arms and breathes freely; the buckram has passed away; here are a few precious minutes, we are all happy, and so—a live animal is sacrificed. So it was with Mr. Hardman; and while the duke's coachman was driving his great horses homeward at a pace that suited himself, the little cheerful circle was laughing in intense enjoyment at the competing histrionics of Old Dick Lumley and young Lord Robert—all, save Mrs. Talbot, who sat in her Chalon attitude, reflecting, and with a distrustful and disquieted face.

END OF VOL I.

LONDON :
Printed by A. Schulze, 13, Poland Street